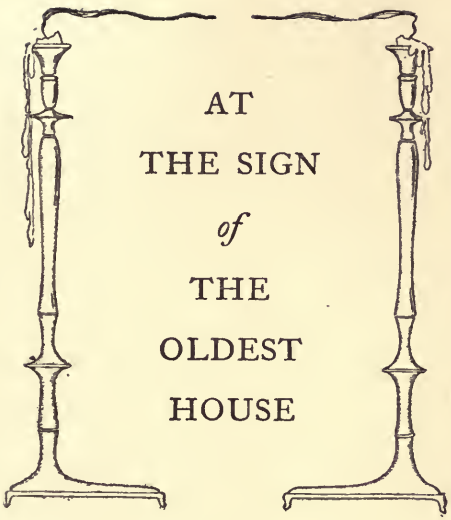
AT THE SIGN OF THE OLDEST HOUSE



JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS

fiction


AT
THE SIGN
of
THE
OLDEST
HOUSE



"Where do you come in?" he wanted to know

AT THE SIGN *of* THE OLDEST HOUSE

A Modern Romance

By

JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS

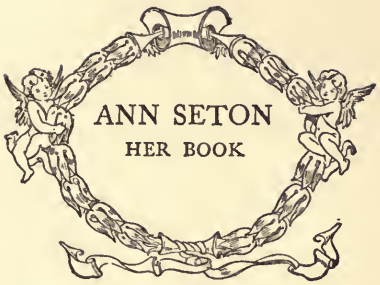
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AT THE SIGN OF THE OLDEST HOUSE

I

PANSY ARRIVES

THE walls showed the original stone, massive oblong blocks, porous with age, under a roof of gray and rotting shingles, shapeless as some old bit of felt that has once been a hat. The casement windows of both stories were modern, but the great, black, hand-hewn door, held together by iron bands, needed no proof of authenticity. Though the component parts were so large, the house itself was tiny, and might have stood at a meeting of English lanes. Over the door hung a shabby sign:

OLDEST HOUSE IN AMERICA
Curios—Valuable Antiques—Paintings

Tourists drifted in by twos and threes, pausing just inside the door to enjoy the mellow brown pleasantness of the raftered room, the rich lights given out by massed glass and china, gold and bronze and old dull jewels, inlaid woods and paintings grown mysteriously black. At first they were scarcely aware of a small elderly woman who took a quarter from every one over twelve, and turned a darkly suspicious stare on any one who claimed to be under that age. She allowed them to browse happily among the treasures, keeping on them the eye of a Yankee schoolmistress who watches her class room fill, but letting them imagine themselves free until a dozen or more had collected; then she suddenly unlocked her lips and released her tale.

"La's and gen'm, this sword with the

'grave' gol' scabbard 'nlaid with for-ty-sev-en precious stone 'nclud' di's, rub's, sapph's, was p'sented Gen' La-fay-ette on the 'casion of his last vis't to 'Mer'ca in rec'nition 'fis dis-tin-guished services to 'r coun'ry. This dull black weap'n, of no grace or beauty, carr' by a cont'nental soldier Gen' Israel Putnam's c'mand—" and so on in a steady drone that filled every corner of the room and permitted no escape. How she managed to keep up her unbroken recital, collect fresh quarters, guard the treasures while she herded her flock upstairs as well as down, would have been a wonder to an inquiring spirit. But the tourists only found her funny or terrifying or a nuisance; not one ever thought about her side of it.

When the closing hour drove the last vis-

itor to the threshold, she was still nursing her arms with a truculent alertness, but sometimes the final closing of the door seemed to clap the strength out of her, leaving her a little bent old shell of a woman, almost too tired to brew her cup of tea. Yet the spirit never got so far down that a touch on the knocker could not bring it up again, militant.

Few but Mr. Angus came, for this was the loneliest little crooked street in the world, though it was but ten minutes long, and the main business of the city streamed past its lower end. At the joining, the black iron sign of Angus MacDonald, Antiques and Reproductions, hung from a quaintly plastered and gabled front that ignored a plain American clapboarded rear. Perhaps Mr. Angus himself presented a little the

same combination. He was a stooping young man with a poetic face, older than his twenty-eight years warranted, though undoubtedly not so old as it had once been for eighteen. But, though his dark eyes dreamed and his sparse black hair clung to an artist's skull, his skilful hands could make or mend anything, and his appreciation of the Jacobean and Georgian periods did not prevent him from being an extraordinarily good business man in the era of Woodrow Wilson. He had been sketching some lovely old Tudor carving for the past fortnight, and so, coming up the lane nearly every night, he perhaps saw more than the oaken fruits and garlands.

"Mrs. Sparks, when is that granddaughter coming?" he kept suggesting.

"What do I want of a girl about under

my feet?" was the spirited answer. "There's work enough in this place now."

"But mightn't she be helpful?"

"She might." There was grim humor in the admission. "Yes, I dare say she might be—a girl of eighteen with her head full of nonsense. She wants to 'see life,' she writes me. That's why she's eager to come down here and rub up the brass. H'h!" And Mrs. Sparks, taking one of Daniel Webster's andirons into her lap, polished it with a relentlessness that made one glad it was not a grandchild.

Mr. Angus spoke absently, his eyes on his sketch: "You can see life anywhere you look for it, can't you?"

"Well, I guess Pansy'd be looking on Main Street—somewheres between the movies and the soda fountains. *Pansy!*"

Mrs. Spark's nose made visible and audible comment. "Of all the foolish names to start a girl out with—and my daughter's a real sensible woman, too. Pansy's what we named the cows, back where I was raised."

"Has the name influenced her?" Mr. Angus wanted to know.

"How can I tell? I haven't seen her for a dozen years. And I don't mean to. I'd like to see my daughter—" the busy hands faltered, the eyes fixed on things distant and past; then Daniel Webster was set down with a reproving bump. "But I don't want any Pansys here, and I'm going to write and tell them so," she concluded crisply. "They needn't to worry about me. I guess I can manage a few years yet." She put away her polishes, moving painfully, her hand occasionally pressed against her hip. "It's time

to close up the house," she added, and he rose in some haste. She had been sending him home ever since he was a lanky boy, mooning over the treasures instead of playing ball and making a healthy noise.

Mr. Angus put his sketches under his arm and opened the great door; then, his good night swallowed, he dropped back until the long carved table stopped him. He looked startled, yet dubious, as though he had seen such things before and they had always turned out to be illusions.

The door had swung wide, and framed against the blackness without stood youth incarnate, the radiant young womanhood of a free country, shy yet unafraid, gallantly planted on two sturdy feet. The light of the old room poured over that one spot, leaving the man and the old woman in



"Granny, I'm Pansy!" she said, as one who tells glorious news

shadow. Eyes like excited corn-flowers shone on them out of a rosy face, broad and deeply curving over a throat as soft as a bird's. Health, wealth, happiness—all the good wishes seemed to have come to the threshold of the Oldest House. The three waited in silent suspense, as though they recognized the size of this moment in their histories. Then the girl spoke in a clear young voice that bubbled over with the fun of life:

"Granny, I'm Pansy!" she said, as one who tells glorious news.

II

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON CRADLE

I

THE door of the Oldest House in America was swinging back with a new energy. Tourists were greeted now by a rosy maid, dressed in an old-time costume, who took their quarters and made them register in the visitors' book with a suppressed air of finding it fun. The lifted face under the Elizabethan cap, the print gown and scarlet stockings played their ancient part so delightfully that the tourists would have expressed their appreciation according to their kind, but the doorkeeper was strictly business, and would give no response beyond

that effect of firmly crushed dimples. The only conversation was the custodian's relentless tale.

"La's and gen'm, this gen-u-ine Chippendale highboy, 'riginally made for King George II, was brought o'er in *Mayflower* by 'nancestor Tho's Jefferson, and was 'n use by the grea' statesman till's death. The solid Sheffield snuffers and tray that you see— You come with us, and I'll tell you the beginning later," she interrupted herself, speaking with some sharpness to a couple that had just entered. She might have been marking them "tardy" in her class book. They were a properous, even an imposing young couple, the stalwart man carrying an air of college honors, the girl of a pretty moth-like delicacy, but they meekly fell in with the group.

The high drone ran on, staccato facts jetting out at intervals: "We pause in rev'rence 'fore this picture of the seated Madonna. You will 'bserve cherub in lower lef' corner; the gr-e-a-t Raphael himself is s'pos' to've pain' the hands. Connoisseurs from alloworld have stood here and agreed that only the gr-e-a-t Raphael could 'a' pain' those hands. . . . 'Gravings showing Hamlet at the Grave of Yor'k and Gen'l Lee's Surrender were once in the p'ssession of Aaron Burr, as was also this round lava snuff-box with view V'suvius on the lid. This gate-legged table of cherrywood—"

The group listened solemnly, lower jaws slightly dropped; only the distinguished new couple exchanged smiles. Presently these two tried to linger over a set of rose luster, but were firmly summoned.

"If you don't keep up, you'll miss what I'm saying, and I can't say it twice for one group," the custodian explained, not disagreeably, but as one who expounds common sense to the young mind. The girl secretly pinched the man's fingers as they hastened to obey. It was so deftly done that none of the group saw, but Pansy straightened like an angler who feels a bite, and put a tiny pencil mark on the door-post, where there was a long row of such marks. Her round blue eyes did not again leave them.

"We come now to one of the most precious treasures of this 'nique c'lection. This rosewood cradle was slep' in by the grea' Georg' Wash' when he was a babe. Rub your hand on it and you will be cured of the habit of telling lies." The customary pause was made, and after the customary giggles

and hesitations, shy hands were rubbed along the cradle's edge. Mrs. Sparks stood by like one who holds a glass for a child to drink, her eyes on her own affairs, and took no note of who rubbed and who did not, but Pansy edged near to her couple. The girl had put out a hand toward the cradle, but hesitated, and finally, with a laugh, drew it back.

"I don't know that I want to be absolutely cured of telling lies," she protested, looking up for him to find that charming. It was evidently expected of everything she did.

"You couldn't tell a lie to save your neck," the young man returned, his own hand meanwhile giving the cradle an honest rub.

"Yes, I could," she insisted. "I often have."

He took the statement merely as more charm, and laughed down on her. "Well, so long as you don't do it to me—!"

He was, after all, very much bigger and stronger than she; her power over him was merely his voluntary submission to the silken thread of her charm. Perhaps some realization of this touched her, for a shadow crossed her face. She defied it, however. and pulled the silken thread.

"What would you do to me if I did?" she wanted to know.

"Put you in the closet."

"But you would come in with me, wouldn't you?" The thread was a very cable, and brought him against her arm.

"I suppose so!" he derided himself. "Well, give it a rub, Margy—preventive medicine—and we'll go on."

"I won't! I think there are some things one has a perfect right to lie about," she maintained pettishly, then looked up to see if the charm was in full working order. But this time he did not laugh.

"I hate to have you say that, even in fun," he said. "A liar is the one thing on earth I can't stand."

Her pretty person shrank a little. "Suppose I asked you something that you didn't want to tell—that you had a right not to tell," she argued; "shouldn't you be justified—"

"I wouldn't lie to you if the truth wrecked both our lives," he said vehemently. "Why, Margy, I could sooner strike you!"

Her argument was crushed. He had called up something that lay deep down un-

der her prettiness and charm, something that caught at her breath and darkened her lifted eyes with a passionate reverence. Her spirit was visibly on its knees before him; but the custodian, turning back, fixed him with stern spectacles.

"If you don't keep up with the party, you won't know a thing you've seen," she called at him. They started, and their gaiety was suddenly relit.

"The old dame will take a ruler to me if we don't look out," he murmured, hurrying her after the group, which was mounting the stairs to gape at Dolly Madison's bed and Daniel Webster's fire-dogs and Nellie Custis's warming pan. Her hand, after all, had not touched the cradle.

It was the last group of the day. The young couple lingered until Mrs. Sparks

began to spread sheets over the treasures, then they reluctantly departed. Pansy knew how long it took them to reach the corner, for she watched them from behind Dolly Madison's bed. Then she came running down-stairs.

"Oh, Granny, it's such fun," she cried. "They are frightfully in love, and yet I think there's something—something on her mind—"

"Now, Pansy, get out the brass polish and don't be a goose," was the discouraging answer.

Pansy's blitheness was undisturbed. "I'll change my dress first," she said, and skipped away, singing. Taking off the cap and the flowered print did not remove her quaint Elizabethan quality. Even in a gingham apron she was still a rosy maid, a little

wench, for a poet's heart, and her eighteen was heavenly young.

"They must be rich, Granny," she burst out, going at the eternal polishing with a rapturous energy. "Their clothes were actually plain, and yet they took your breath. It's the poorer brides that are all fussed up. They're my twenty-seventh bridal couple, and it's the first that has given me any real thrill. The others have just gawked about and giggled and said, 'Aren't you awful!' Or else they made talk, hard—it's funny, how little brides have to say! I shouldn't be like that."

"It takes more than a husband to stop some tongues," was the severe rejoinder.

Pansy laughed. "Well, but, Granny, listen! Where was I? Oh, yes—thrill. You see, they were in love, but they weren't

sloppy about it; they didn't make you want to get away and beat your head against a wall and kick something. You know what I mean?"

"I can't say that I do."

"Oh, come off, Granny—you do, too. I mean, they were really romantic—not just sticky. And there is something in her life that he doesn't know—I'm sure there is. They didn't notice me—"

A knock at the door interrupted, and she flew to answer it. Her voice sang and bubbled:

"Oh, *hel*-lo, Mr. Angus!"

"*Hel*-lo, Miss Bouncing Bet!" The amused greeting was followed by an amused face; Mr. Angus came in, carrying a pair of antique bellows under his arm.

"How does our sweet mistress? And have there been many roisterers at the tavern this fair night?"

"Oh, get out!" said Pansy frankly, wavering between laughter and resentment. "Why do you always talk that stuff to me?" she added, standing very straight before him on her two plump feet and twirling a corner of her apron in her fingers. He laughed silently.

"Because in a previous incarnation my name was John Suckling," he said.

"Well, I think it was a disgusting name, and I'd keep it to myself," she disposed of that. "Did you mend old Cornwallis? Oh, you did, beautifully. Granny, look how Mr. Angus has mended old Corny!"

The grandmother looked grudgingly over

her spectacles. "Well enough," she said dryly, but added an uneasy, "It must have cost you a heap of time, Mr. Angus."

"Oh, that is all right," he assured her. "The privilege of copying it more than repays me."

"Could you copy the carved oak sideboard? Because there's a leg of that coming loose," Pansy suggested.

Everything that she said seemed to give him a mysterious joy. He bent with his silent laugh to look at the loose leg. "That will be nothing. I can do it in five minutes," he said. "I will bring over my tools some night soon. Anything else? Miss Pansy must be a comfort to you, Mrs. Sparks, finding all the breaks."

"She's well enough," was the cool answer. Then, as the granddaughter ran up the

stairs, she beckoned him to a chair beside her and spoke behind a curved hand: "The best girl that ever lived, Mr. Angus! You wouldn't believe her willingness. The cap and dress was her own idea—she saw them in that old book by your hand. It's fun, she says. If she sells a postcard, it's fun. It's fun to help with the polishing. She's a rare, sweet—" She broke off as the gay step came bouncing down. "Well, Pansy, what more are you bothering Mr. Angus with?" she grumbled.

"The Georgian candlestick;" Pansy displayed it. "The top wobbles; and if he copied it, he'd sell dozens."

"Oh, go along!" said Mrs. Sparks, but Mr. Angus had taken the candlestick and was studying it interestedly.

"It is worth considering," he said. "We

put the Cornwallis bellows in the window this morning, and we have had a nibble already. A young couple almost bought it."

Pansy started. "Was her name Margy?"

"Why, I believe it was. Yes; he called her that."

She rejoiced aloud. Then she drew up a stool close in front of him, and squeezing her doubled hands together on her squeezed knees, lifted her face wholly to his and took one huge breath, that she need not again be obliged to stop. "Now, Mr. Angus, suppose you had a beautiful and charming bride, and suppose there was some dark secret in her life that she had a perfect right not to tell you about, but suppose you asked her questions: don't you think she'd have a right to tell you a lie?"

His face was forcibly drawn down into



"But my beautiful bride must not have dark secrets from me"

the expected seriousness. "But my beautiful bride must not have dark secrets from me," he protested.

"Oh, well, suppose it was her mother's secret: suppose her mother had had—"

"Now, Pansy, that will do," interposed the grandmother, and added a parenthetic, "The things that child gets hold of!" to Mr. Angus.

"Well, suppose it, anyway;" Pansy bounced with impatience. "And suppose you asked questions, and I lied to you. I had to." The clear innocent eyes, lifted straight to his, did not notice how his mouth was jerked open, as though by a shock, and then very quietly and cautiously closed. "When you found it out, would you be furious?"

He seemed unable to answer immedi-

ately. "I should not like it," he said at last, but his tone was inattentive.

"No; now, *really,*" she insisted, "aren't there times when a lie is right?"

He roused himself to meet her demand. "Not from my wife to me," he said. "No; that is hideous. My wife need not have a beautiful face, but she can't do unbeautiful things."

Pansy was moved, but rebellious. "I think there are lots of worse things than lying," she argued. "So does Margy. She wouldn't rub the George Washington cradle this afternoon, and I am sure she was perfectly justified."

He was looking at her very kindly. "No, no; I think you'd better rub it, little maid," he said.

"Pouf! I rub it every day with a chamois, and it hasn't made the slightest difference," was the robust answer. "Well, Mr. Margy feels just as you do; and I'm afraid there's trouble ahead for my twenty-seventh couple. Oh, *gee,* but I'd like to know the end of the story!" And the sigh of Pansy's desire nearly rent her garments.

"If they come back for the bellows, I will find out all I can," he promised.

"Oh, do! Seeing life is frightfully interesting, isn't it!" she went on. "I see chunks of it every day here. It's all so exciting that some nights I can't bear to go to sleep—it's like tearing yourself away from a party."

Mrs. Sparks suddenly lifted her head from the old silver tray she was rubbing. "I'd like to know who's been having a party

in the Louis Philippe court suit," she said. "This morning it was not as I left it. Did you have it out, Pansy?"

Mr. Angus was laughing, and the girl flushed.

"No; I did not," she said resentfully.

"Well, it's mighty queer. Some tourist must have got at it when my back was turned. They'll do anything, those tourists. Now you better put the kettle on if you want any supper," she added, and Mr. Angus said a hasty good night.

2

MR. ANGUS came back the next evening with his box of tools. Supper and work were done, and Pansy sat on the door-step, unwontedly quiet and drooping, staring down the street with her chin on her doubled fists. Dim moonlight took the ancient house and the girl and the narrow broken street back into the mellow past, and Angus, pausing before her, swept long musical fingers across his tool-box.

" 'No grape that's kindly ripe could be
So round, so plump, so soft as she,' "

he chanted; then dropped down beside her. "What were you looking for, sweet mistress?" he asked.

She had not given him the usual bubbling greeting, and her answer frowned. "Life!

I was wishing life would come down the middle of the street on a great white charger and sweep me off into the thick of things!"

"Ah, and there came instead a dealer in antiques and reproduction with a tool-box!" he lamented; but his apology was only skin deep, and his smile seemed to hint that the substitute might not prove such an anti-climax as it sounded. "Life arrives in queer guises," he went on. "Perhaps, when it comes to sweep you off, it will bring a little wheelbarrow instead of a white charger."

"Then I won't go," was the severe answer.

His fingers again struck imaginary strings.

" 'The streets were so broad and the lanes were so narrow—'

A wheelbarrow, a nice, tidy little green one with a bunch of flowers painted on the back,

could be quite as poetic as a white charger," he suggested.

"You didn't think so when you were young," said Pansy in all unconsciousness. Again she had delivered a shock that jerked open his mouth. It shut in a cold line.

"I didn't suppose I was exactly ancient," he observed.

"Oh, well, only compared to me," said Pansy politely.

He took quick breath, as though to cast at her the tale of his years, then let it go and sat dazedly silent; his head on his hand weighed so heavily that his elbow visibly dug into his knee.

"We had three bridal couples to-day, but they weren't much fun," Pansy presently began, kicking listlessly at the step.

"Oh, I meant to tell you;" he made an

effort to pull himself back to his former level. "Your couple came in to-day and bought the bellows."

"Oh! They did!" She was suddenly revived. "Oh, Mr. Angus, what did you find out? Tell me everything they said!"

He had evidently taken very careful mental notes, and he clasped his thumb for the first item: "They are on their way back from an extensive trip—plenty of money, evidently." The forefinger came next: "Their home is in—"

"Oh, the facts don't matter," she interrupted. "How are they getting on—how did they look at each other? Did you feel any trouble?"

He released his fingers and considered. "In a way, perhaps. She was a little wistful; happy, yet a bit shadowed, and very,

very anxious that he should always find her lovely. She touched me; she had a fragile, anemone quality. He was blunt, almost rough, beside her. Too male for her! She should have married a more sensitive, poetic—"

"I think he was a thousand times too good for her!" The suddenness of the onslaught left him speechless. Pansy, bolt upright, rushed on: "He was a man, a big, live, strong, splendid *man,* and she was a little dolly flirt. Oh, pretty and cunning and all that—just about good enough for a poet. But she wasn't good enough for him!" Truly Pansy was unaccountable to-night. Her eyes were blazing over this unknown pair, and her intentions were so plainly hostile that he stiffened.

"Are you not perhaps confusing the he-

roic quality and masculine bulk?" he asked, very coldly and politely. "I grant you his ox muscles. But her finer fiber—"

"She's a liar," said Pansy. "She said so herself."

Silence fell between them. Presently he rose and carried his tools into the house. His voice could be heard talking with Mrs. Sparks as he tightened the loose leg of the sideboard; it sounded aloof and strange without the usual merry indulgence that he put in it for Pansy. When he came out, she was not there.

Something was wrong with Pansy. For three days her step on the stairs lagged, her joy was quenched. Nothing was fun. Mrs. Sparks's allusions to the wrong side of bed and black dogs on shoulders brought no response. Some inner argument went about

with her, fixing her eyes and shaping her lips into defiant phrases. The fourth morning was showery and few tourists came; by afternoon a heavy downpour seemed to have cut them off altogether. Pansy had gone to take off her costume when a knock brought her drearily back.

Her face brightened as she discovered her couple. She would have turned on the lights for them, but they liked the rainy dimness better, they protested, openly happy at finding the big room free of tourists. Mrs. Sparks looked in from the kitchen, where she was brewing her rheumatism remedy, but, seeing who it was, made a slight sound in her nose and returned to her labors. The two presently drifted to a case of relics, which offered a resting-place for elbows, and brought bent heads close to-

gether. In the silence of the room, they forgot a plump Elizabethan maid, sitting as still as any of the antiques in the shadow of the door.

"Marie Antoinette was a great little old slipper wearer," he was saying. "I never went into a museum yet that I didn't see one of hers."

"You don't really suppose this is genuine?" she objected.

He bent to read the fine-hand inscription. "It says it is. What a doubter you are, Margy! I believe everything I'm told."

Her eyes fell and her head drooped over the case. The wistful quality that Mr. Angus had harped on was, after all, a fact. "That is because you are so splendidly true," she said. "Some people aren't born that way, dear. They have to learn it—hard."



"What a doubter you are, Margy!"

Then she looked up at him, and her eyes said, "You are so glorious!" while his answered, "You are so sweet!" "Forgive me —promise you will forgive me!" hers went on.

"Aren't you getting tired, dear? Ought you to be standing?" he answered, a hand under her elbow.

"Oh, no;" and she turned with a suppressed sigh to the next case. She did not seem to have the heart to pull the silken thread this afternoon, but he came readily without it. When any history was needed, he asked her as confidently as though she had been his mother, and she could always answer.

"You're uncommon educated, Margy," he said at last, straightening up from some jeweled orders, whose owners had all been

familiar figures to her. "You got a tremendous head start of me those first three months!" She winced, so sharply that he laughed, laying a big hand on her shoulder. "Goosie! What does it matter which of us was born in April and which in July? You don't really think that that makes you older than I?"

She would not look at him. "Some girls wouldn't have told you at all," she said with a catch in her breath, starting away from him so abruptly that she nearly tripped over the George Washington cradle. He followed her, still laughing.

"You're putting this on," he insisted. "You don't care—you can't. It's too ridiculous." She stood staring into the cradle, and made no answer. "I didn't mean to tease

you, dear!" His hand came back, coaxingly. "I apologize. I'm a—"

Suddenly she slipped down to her knees, one arm across the cradle, looking intently at the place where once a fateful little head had rested. After a long minute, her hand softly rubbed the edge.

"I am three years older than you," she said, very quietly. "Three years and three months. I didn't tell you the truth—I was afraid."

"Why, Margy!" He could not believe he had understood. "What are you saying?"

"Just that. I lied to you." She held herself stiffly cool and aloof, as though determined to make no appeal against his judgment. She did not need to look into his face to know the pain she had given. After a

stunned moment, he made an effort to hide the shocked recoil of his whole being.

"Girls—do that, I suppose—about age;" the words stumbled. "Only—it wasn't necessary, you know."

"I know now; but I didn't then. And in the beginning it didn't seem so terrible. It has grown worse and worse, knowing you; and now, knowing what is—" Her arm tightened across the cradle. "I couldn't stand it another hour. It scorches me. I hate it as you hate it. Of course, I have lost your respect; but it was better—"

His rigidity suddenly melted. "Oh, you plucky little soul—you true little soul!" he muttered. "Margy, you're finer even than I knew."

She lifted her face, her whole heart, to him. "You forgive me?"

"My dear!" His arm raised her, drew her beyond the carved oak sideboard. For a long time their murmurs and their silences came from the John Quincy Adams davenport in its shadow. When at last they emerged, remembering with some embarrassment where they were, the room was empty, and no one saw the white peace on her upturned face.

"They might have taken everything in the house," Mrs. Sparks scolded, hearing the front door close, and finding the treasures unguarded.

Pansy did not appear until the afternoon was over. She brought a flushed face and heavy eyes, and she went at the polishing without answering sundry comments on people who had time to sleep all day. When the knocker sounded, she jumped.

"What ails you, child? It's only Mr. Angus," Granny said, opening the door herself.

Mr. Angus' bearing was formal, and he held the Georgian candlestick conspicuously, that his coming might instantly be explained.

"Sit down a bit. It's good to have some one to speak to, for Pansy's lost her tongue," Mrs. Sparks greeted him.

He looked a quick question at Pansy. She tried to scowl down a flush, then, finding it hopeless, dropped her work and started to her feet.

"All right then," she said exasperatedly. "All right, all right!" Plunging into the shadows, she dragged out the George Washington cradle, planted it with defiant energy before them, and faced them across it, her hands on its polished hood. "I told

you both a whopper the other day," she flung at them. "About the Louis Philippe court suit. I had had it on the night before, after Granny went to bed—yes, I did, Granny, the whole thing. And I know now why they're called small clothes, for they *are*. But I did it. I dressed up and I paraded round and had a heavenly time. Then Mr. Angus laughed, and I lied. And now you know it." Her eyes filled, so she did not see all that happened in his—the quick leap of laughter, then the compassion and the rising joy.

"Pansy, you are a gentleman," he said gravely, coming to take her hand.

"Well, what you'll be doing next!" muttered Mrs. Sparks.

Pansy put back the cradle with a hearty rub and returned to her polishing. She had found her tongue again, and her blitheness.

"Mr. Angus, you say that things are beautiful or ugly," she burst out, "and Granny says they're good or wicked, and I say that they're fun or they're hateful, but I guess we all mean about the same thing!"

His delight in her carved creases in his lean face.

"I guess we do!" he assented.

"I'm seeing life every day," Pansy went on with a long sigh of content. "I wish I had time to come and help in your shop, too, Mr. Angus. I'll bet I'd see a lot of life there."

He gave her an odd look, then rose as though he had changed his mind about staying.

"It is quite likely that you would," he said dryly. "Well, I have letters to write. Good night!" And he left in haste.

III

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

I

THERE were days at the Oldest House when the door was guarded by Mrs. Sparks, upright in a cushioned chair, her expression compounded of human distrust and sciatica, while the rosy maid in her old-time costume took the groups about and poured out a faithful imitation of the custodian's tale. Pansy, whose youngness was as flagrant as a calf's or a kitten's, could not keep her tourists in the usual meek bunch; they straggled and interrupted with questions as they never dared do under Granny's eye. Once an impertinent pedant even challenged her story.

"How could a highboy that was made for George II have come over in the *Mayflower?*" he wanted to know.

Pansy put that down with a strong hand. "My grandmother has been saying it this way for twenty years," she told him. "If you think you know more about it than she does—!" Then, seeing him still disposed to argue, she passed abruptly to one of the major attractions, leading her flock through a back door into an open court, paved with ancient flags that slanted down toward the well in the middle. A bucket of water stood on the curb, and a pile of paper cups. Pansy took Granny's attitude, holding a cup over the bucket, and unconsciously reproducing her high drone:

"This well, la's and gen'm, dates back as far as the house does, and possibly even

farther. You are standing on the spot where the original Fountain of Youth, so famed in song and story, once gushed forth. Others will claim that theirs is the original fountain, but this is known to be the only true source. In these living waters lurks the secret of youth, which ancient alchemy and modern science have in vain sought to capture. Drink this and put off old age."

Granny's withered hand, when it was she who offered the cup, might well have roused skepticism, and a modern distrust of wells and old buckets kept back the majority, but there were always a few humorous spirits to try it and to enact sudden youth. Today the amused group forgot about the George II highboy, but Pansy was inwardly perturbed. It had never before occurred to her to question Granny's tale; and yet, if

one thought about dates, there was a discrepancy!

"Well, it's the way I learned it," Mrs. Sparks disposed of the question; "and I'm too old to change. I guess it's as true as the Fountain of Youth."

Pansy was startled. "But, Granny, there is something in the Fountain," she maintained. "Why, look at Mr. Angus. I thought he was about a hundred when I first came, and I made him drink just for a joke. But he's been growing younger and younger. Haven't you noticed it?"

Granny's keen glance rested for a moment on the unconscious face. "Well, you let it alone, Pansy, or I'll have to be buying a baby carriage," she observed, limping off to bed.

Pansy put through the work of the old

house with a joyous rush, and, after she had washed the supper dishes, sat down on a fiddle-back chair by the stone hearth to repair a beaded hassock that had once rested the feet of Madam Hancock. Sometimes she hummed or whistled, or let her feet do a little dance of their own. When the knocker sounded, she sprang up.

"*Hel*-lo, Mr. Angus!" she sang out before she could fairly have seen who it was.

He usually answered in kind: "*Hel*-lo, Miss Bouncing Bet!" But to-night he came in with a grave, "Good evening, Pansy." It was not more chilling than the change in the whole man. His new youth had fallen from him; he looked sad, and curiously startled, as though he had had a shock.

"What's wrong?" Pansy demanded.

He tried to smile. "Wrong? Nothing

that I know of. I have had rather a—hard day, that's all."

"I'll bet you didn't have a Granny with sciatica and forty-three tourists on your hands!"

He took that in with a somber stare. "You faithful and joyous spirit!" he said suddenly. "Nothing is hard or dull to you —or with you. You give everything life. You're wonderful, Pansy, wonderful!"

She was honestly amazed. "Me? Why, Mr. Angus—Granny would tell you better. She thinks I'm the scum of the earth."

She had made him smile. Presently, with the tale of the day's adventures, she even roused a laugh. She was proud of her success, and tumbled out for his diversion all her young wisdom, trying to stave off the final, "Well, I have letters to write," that

always hovered over their good times. He used to say it with satisfaction, even with importance; lately it had been growing reluctant, sighing, but it always took him away. To-night it came out, "Well, I've got to write a letter!" so miserably that Pansy gave up trying to divert him and went straight at the facts.

"Then why do you write it?" she asked. "What's the matter, anyway?"

The face lifted to his was rosy and kind, full of health and sense; all about them the mellow past offered a background rich with experience. Mr. Angus dropped down again.

"I have been corresponding for three years with a very, very dear friend," he said. "A remarkable woman. Her friendship has been—a great honor to me. She

was here three years ago, for two months. I was—I grew—"

"Of course," said Pansy dejectedly, and silence fell on the old room.

"She is seven years older than I," he flung out.

Pansy stared. "Why, then she's—"

"Thirty-five," he interrupted irritably. "That is not middle age, Pansy. A woman may be very young at thirty-five. She did not make any secret of it—she used to laugh about it. I was old for my age—three years ago. We seemed—contemporary." Mr. Angus was quite unconscious that he sighed.

Pansy had cheered up immensely. "I know," she said. "Why, you were old for your age when I first came, Mr. Angus! And that was only three months ago."

She had struck the right note to revive him. He leaned toward her, watching her intently. "And you have seen a difference?" he asked.

"You bet," she assured him. "Why, at first you were more like an uncle. Your eyes sort of patted me, as if I were an awfully nice pup." She was quite serious, and looked surprised at his burst of laughter.

"And how about my eyes now?" he suggested, shining down on her.

She took an honest survey of them while she thought it out. "Now it's more like a jolly older brother," she decided. That was not successful; he looked touchingly dashed. "An awfully jolly one," she insisted, and then, seeing no improvement, added an apology: "Of course, I never did have a brother. I've only imagined them."

A convalescent smile thanked her; but his momentary cheer was gone.

"Letters are queer things," he said, dropping his head on his two hands. "One leads a separate life in a—an intimate correspondence. It is real, in its way. And yet, when you try to bring that life and your daily life together, you see how—oh, imaginary the letter-life has been."

Pansy mended a bead rose in silence. "I don't see what you write about," she said at last. "When I've said that Granny is well and that I'm having loads of fun, I've got right down to 'Your loving Pansy.' I couldn't fill more than three and a half pages to save my neck."

"I wish to heaven I couldn't!" he said impatiently. "It is an egotistic indulgence—pouring out your thoughts and feelings and

reactions on life. I am tired to death of it! It isn't healthy! And it takes time!" His voice rose indignantly. "I want my evenings for reading and exercising and visiting my neighbors—confound it, I can't write letters all the time!"

"Then why haven't you stopped it?" Pansy demanded.

"Ah, my dear girl, it isn't so simple as that. One can't hurt people, or fail them. If one has—created an obligation, a—an—"

Pansy, as usual, drove straight at the point. "You don't mean you're engaged to her!"

The word visibly went through him. "Not—well, no; but I have always given her to understand that—that if ever she did—want a more—" He got up with a suddenness that overturned his chair. "Please

forget all this, Pansy. I had no right to say so much. Only you are such a—I think such a lot of you, I want you to understand. Good-by." He put out his hand with a finality that alarmed her.

"You're not going away!"

"Oh, no. But Miss Olcott is coming here," he said simply. "She will be down next week. I have just heard. I shan't see you—I mean, I shall be busy—well, good night, Pansy!" He took her hand again, then hurried away.

Pansy thought it over very soberly, her arms crossed on Madam Hancock's hassock. Then she shrugged.

"H'm! Thirty-*five*," she said.

It was a bad week, for Granny was almost helpless, and her highest praise was, "Well, I guess it will have to do!" Pansy's blithe-

ness became a little dimmed before it was over. Mr. Angus did not come in even Sunday night, but two days later he appeared in mid-afternoon, much dressed up and palpably excited, escorting a tall and lovely lady.

Pansy had opened the door, and for a moment she stood inhospitably blank, for the solid earth seemed to be reeling under her feet. What did thirty-five years matter if one could look so fine and finished, and smile with so charming a grace? For the first time, Pansy was ashamed of the costume that had always been "such fun." She felt a hot desire to snatch off the childish cap and print gown, the scarlet stockings and buckled shoes, that gave strangers the right to look at her as if she were a little girl!

Mr. Angus was stammering something that was meant for an introduction, and the lady came to his aid.

"I have heard so much of Pansy," she said, putting out her hand with a friendliness that would have won Pansy's good heart under other circumstances. "I don't know you by any other name."

Pansy could not find her speech. She stood humiliated and helpless, furious at her own bread-and-butter youth, beating herself with cruel words; and could not dream that Miss Olcott, looking down from her immeasurable advantage of years and experience, perhaps saw some unsuspected value in soft young curves and flushing shyness. The lady's lips came together in a grave line, as though for a moment she had caught her breath. Then she smiled again,



Mr. Angus was stammering something that was meant for an introduction

this time at Mr. Angus; but he was looking at Pansy and did not see. Miss Olcott stepped inside.

"I used to know this old place intimately," she said. "It is good to see it again. I hope Mrs. Sparks is well?"

"Yes, thank you; only she is in bed with sciatica," Pansy brought out, then hated herself worse than ever.

"I am sorry. I hope—Ah, look, Angus! Here is the little old Betty Cavendish sampler." She laughed as though it had some association for them both, and he responded eagerly, nervously. His laugh came incessantly as they made the slow tour of the room. The place was rich with reminiscence for them; their repeated, "Don't you remember—" beat and bruised Pansy as she stood forgotten by the door. Miss Ol-

cott kept using his name, Angus, with a careless ease that seemed to make a princess of her; not in the most secret depths of her heart had Pansy ever called him anything but Mr. Angus. Once he said her name, Edith, not amusedly, as he said "Pansy," but with a gravity that gave it a sickening significance. The door into the court was open, and she paused there, looking out with a deepening smile.

"The old Fountain of Youth, Angus!"

He tried to smile back, but could not quite meet her straight look. "Will you drink again?" he asked.

"You always insisted that I didn't need it," she reminded him.

"Oh, I was the one who really needed it," he said quickly. "You gave me my first draft of it, Edith."

"And you have gone on imbibing, I suspect!"

"Do I seem younger than you remembered me?"

She glanced him over thoughtfully. "Younger than your letters. Do I seem older than mine?" Then she cut off his answer. "Never mind—don't tell me. Thirty-five is a nice age, far nicer than thirty-two was. I wouldn't go back a day. Youth hurts too much—it wants too much."

"And you think you have escaped that—yet?" he challenged her.

"I am much farther from it than you are, my dear," she said, leading the way out into the court. For a long time they leaned on the well curb, talking in low tones, but neither drank.

No tourists happened to come, and Pansy

had nothing to do but to watch them. When at last they lifted their heads, they saw her, a drooping little maid in an old-time costume, sitting on Madam Hancock's hassock with her head against the dark wood of a grandfatherly clock.

"I want my tea," said Miss Olcott abruptly. "The old lady is tired, Angus; she must have her tea. . . . Do you remember how furious it used to make you when I used that title?"

"It does still," said Angus absently, his eyes on Pansy. "It is too absurd."

She laughed a little, and adjusted the hat that curved over her bright hair. "I wish your little friend could come with us," she said; "but I suppose she can't leave."

That roused him. "Ah, I should like you

to know her," he exclaimed. "She is as sound and sweet and fine as—ripe fruit."

"And she looks like apple blossoms," Miss Olcott added, and, pausing on the threshold, took a long look about the old room. Then she said good night to Pansy with so lovely a friendliness that Pansy was swept by an absurd longing to love her and burst into tears. But she stood very straight on her two sturdy feet and made her grave little answers with blue eyes bravely lifted. Then they were gone together, and the day dragged on to its close.

2

AFTER giving Granny her supper, Pansy brought out broom and duster and polish, for the old house had to be kept in shining order; but at the first stroke of labor her arms wilted down at her sides. The heaviness of her heart seemed to spread through her whole body. She tried feebly to drive it, then, letting the broom drop, she curled down on the door-step in the warm dusk, her face hidden in her arms. In all her joyous, little-girl life she had never known misery like this. It did not seem to be concerned with Mr. Angus, but with the grace and distinction of mature ladies, beside whom others were stupid and helpless and *young*.

"I will grow up," she vowed hotly. "I'll

read more, and study French, and wear corsets—I'll be a fine lady if I bust!" Then realization of the years it would all take crushed her down again. Tears were swelling up to her eyes when the sound of a step scattered them. Mr. Angus was coming down the lane alone.

He wore evening dress under a light overcoat, and he looked so fine, so remote, that the sight of him brought no comfort until she saw the harassed face under the new hat. His distracted eyes held no message for her, but his two hands, taking one of hers, seemed to cling to it.

"I am just on my way to dinner," he said jerkily. "I ran down for a minute." He looked blindly at his watch, then sat down on the step beside her, tightly clasping a

knee in his long fingers. "You saw how lovely she is," he added, his head turned away.

"Yes," said Pansy faintly.

"She has done so much for me," he went on. "Taught me things—about life, and taste—as well as honored me with her friendship. Her suddenly coming down here—I don't know what it means, Pansy. *I don't know what it means.*"

"What do you want it to mean?" Pansy blurted out.

He drew a sharp breath. "Once I would have—Pansy, it isn't a year since I repeated to her that if ever she wanted me, she had only to—lift her finger. And now—" The world seemed to stand still, waiting. "Oh, it was literary love—not flesh and blood love," he cried. "And I didn't know!"



"Oh, it was literary love—not flesh and blood love," he cried

The constellations were suddenly back in their places, the world was going ahead at its normal jolly pace. Pansy had barely time for a silent, astonished, "What have I been fussing about!" before the black abyss of the afternoon was obliterated under a leaping tide of sunny content.

"Well, you will just have to tell her so," she said with practical energy.

"No;" he spoke slowly and solemnly. "No. I couldn't do that, Pansy. She is too —wonderful, too fine in every way. One couldn't fail her. I can't dream that she would really want me, but, if she does, I am pledged."

Pansy seemed to swell all over with righteous protest; then on her released breath came a mighty verdict: "Some people are so high-minded that they haven't got good

sense!" Distraught though he was, he was caught by its clean-cut decision, its Pansy quality of robust honesty. For an instant the old joy in her leaped up in a shaken laugh.

"Ah, Pansy, Pansy!" he cried, and his arms sprang open, as though he would have taken some one in. Then he rose and went away without another word.

"I don't see anything funny in that," Pansy observed; then, remembering the prostrate broom, she jumped up and went vigorously to work.

It was very late when she finished, but she was not sleepy. Some quality of suspense was in the air; her heart raced, and at every chance sound she turned rigid, listening. She argued that no one could possibly come, yet she kept the lights all on, that the house might look awake, and invented a dozen

new tasks to prolong the evening. She was on the point of giving up when a hesitating step made her fling open the door.

"I won't come in," said Mr. Angus, then he absently did come in and sit down. The harassed look had gone, but he was very, very grave, and his words came with difficulty.

"I wanted to tell you, Pansy . . . ah, she is so beautiful! I didn't know there were —women like that. . . . She came here simply on her way to make a visit; she is staying only this one night. She stopped off to—" He forgot to go on, and his eyes, dark and solemn, were fixed on the beauty he had witnessed. Pansy, braced against the table, waited with a gathering frown.

"Well?" she demanded.

He turned to her, but still with no effect

of looking at her. "I have had something better than I deserved," he said. "I can see that. The gods offered me a rare opportunity—and I was only mortal, and missed it. . . . Edith is going to undertake some work, a serious responsibility. She will not have time to write often."

"Well!" said Pansy again.

"Oh, I know. It was what I wanted. Only I can't help seeing what I have lost. Ah, she was wonderful—she understood everything; and she wasn't afraid of speech! It is better this way, but—life isn't as simple as it looks, Pansy. Good night, dear child."

He put out his hands with the aged smile of a great uncle, and went away. Pansy stood glowering at the closed door.

"Nobody's afraid of speech," she mut-

tered. "Nothing so wonderful in that!" Then her defiance melted before an awful and desolating humility. "I'm nothing but an ignorant kid," she admitted, going wearily to her room.

An hour later, sitting up in bed in the darkness, she suddenly spoke aloud:

"I don't see why it aches so—you're not in love with Mr. Angus! Goodness—he's too old. Well, then, what are you fussing about? You stop this nonsense." It worked. A blast of fresh air seemed to pass through the room, clearing away fever and folly, and Pansy, laying herself down with her hand under her cheek, promptly went off to sleep.

Granny was up the next day, able to tend the door, and an unusual rush of tourists kept Pansy busy. She conducted group

after group through the house, and once more everything was "fun." Three bridal couples were vouchsafed her, two of them rustic and funny, one urban and dashing; and, better yet, an engaged couple, loitering behind a kindly unobservant parent. Pansy saw "him" look down and "her" look up, and the meeting of their eyes sent a delicious shock through her. That was the sort of lover she would have some day: young and stalwart and worshipful, just out of college with a football record. Not a letter-writing person who looked at you like an uncle—you bet! At least seven men in seven different groups, drinking at the Fountain of Youth, burst into infant howls, and Pansy beamed with the secret joke that they always did just that. Oh, seeing life was fun!

The last one had gone, and Pansy was out

in the court picking up the paper drinking cups when a quick step crossed the room. It did not sound like Mr. Angus, and for a moment the figure in the doorway scarcely looked like his stooping and poetic presence. His head was flung back, his hands fairly swaggered in his pockets, and there was not a hint of kindly uncle in his lively, "Hello, Pansy!"

The sunset, glowing over the old walls, made a picture of the rosy maid in the old court, and usually he would have stayed where he was to enjoy it, but to-night he came briskly out. "Suppose we have a spree," he said. "Will you? What shall it be?"

"Movies?" suggested Pansy.

"Hooray!" Mr. Angus sat down on the well curb and dipped the last remaining

cup in the bucket. "I am not going to offer you any," he said, lifting the cup as though he toasted her. "You don't need the Waters of Youth—lucky child." The water did not look inviting, but he took it down with a laugh. Then his heels drummed the bricks, and he whistled an air. "How quickly does it work?" he asked, fixing her with a mischievous eye.

"Granny says it doesn't work at all," said Pansy.

"Ho—Granny—what does she know! Pansy, do you suppose Granny was ever in love in all her life?"

"Well, she got married," Pansy argued.

He laughed out. "True. Well, I will bet she doesn't know one thing about the subject now—any more than you do!"



"Why, Mr. Angus, I've been in love five times!"

"Me!" Pansy was indignant. "Why, Mr. Angus, I've been in love five times!"

"You have!" His heels, his shoulders, his very jaw dropped. "Pansy, you don't mean that," he said gravely.

"But I do, too. Why, it has been twice this very winter!"

He was unaccountable. A joy as sudden as his dismay sent up a shout of laughter. He laughed open-mouthed at the sky, so splendidly that Pansy began to laugh too, a clear gurgle of joy that brought his eyes back to hers. Over the wall came the ripple of a street organ, playing a Scotch reel.

"Ta dee, ta dee, ta dee, ta dee—"

His hands took it up, then his feet; he sprang up, facing her, and Pansy, who had

once danced the Highland Fling in costume at a Sunday-school festival, dropped her cups and fell joyously into position. Their heels and hands snapped, they jigged and twirled through the figures, both grave now, intent on doing it right; and Granny, pausing in the doorway, looked on with a sardonic gleam in her old eyes, but turned away before they had seen her.

"Ta dum, ta dum, ta dum, ta dum—"

Their breath was going, their gravity weakening, but still they flung their hands and heels, twirling to the final burst of speed. The last notes dropped them, limp and gasping, on the well curb.

"Wasn't it fun?" cried Pansy.

He mopped his forehead, laughed, then dipped his cup again in the bucket. "I

never was so thirsty in my life," he panted, and would have drunk, but Pansy stopped him.

"Mr. Angus—I truly don't think you'd better drink any more of that water to-night," she protested.

Again his laughter rang in the old court, and, though she did not at all know why, Pansy joined in. Granny, hobbling to the front door, beckoned the departing musician.

"You're a poor old thing—you might as well have that," she muttered, holding out a coin. Perhaps even Granny still knew something about the affairs of youth.

IV

THE WISHING RING

I

PANSY, guarding the door, was accustomed to having strangers smile at her. Sometimes they commented as freely as though her quaint costume rendered her deaf, and once in a while some tourist interpreted the print gown and mob cap as an invitation to familiarity, driving her back to a clean middy and white skirt for several indignant days. But usually they beamed on her very kindly, spreading a pleasant atmosphere of approval and making it all great fun. It was a new experience when a prosperous lady, who had descended from her own motor, looked into the door-

keeper's face with a startled widening of her eyes and an effect of sudden pallor. For an instant Pansy saw a question or a cry at the parted lips; then, to her intense disappointment, nothing happened. The lady paid her quarter and stepped in like any other visitor.

Mrs. Sparks was displaying the sword of Lafayette, and immediately annexed her with a clear, "If you don't go around with this group, you'll have to wait for the next!" that would have brought a crowned head into line. Granny had one tone for all. The lady seemed glad to be taken charge of so efficiently. In spite of her forty or more years, she was girlish still, with the pretty drooping melancholy of one who carries an idealized sorrow. The tilt of her chin, the lift of her brown eyes, every motion of her

graceful body, proclaimed her a much loved, shielded and served person.

"I'll bet that she never in her life went into a butcher shop and looked at a hunk of raw meat," was Pansy's way of expressing this. Pansy watched her unwinkingly, longing for some further sign of agitation, until she saw that the lady was trying to observe her.

"Go ahead," she assented joyously, and pretended to be busy with her picture postals.

Granny's voice droned on: "You ask, la's and gen'm, why we keep this piece red'n'-blue cloth in sep' glass case. It is one of the most precious treasures of this 'nique c'lection. If you read the card, you will see that this torn piece red'n'blue cloth was once part of the housings of Gen. Wash's saddle.

. . . This carv' oak spice-cupboard, brought o'r by William Penn, the founder of— Don't lean on that glass, please; first thing you know, you'll break it. . . . This ring will interest you. It was found in the p'ssession of the Seminole Indians, but is of old Spanish work'ship, and is b'liev' to have magic properties. Place it on the third fing' left hand, turning it three times, and your wish will be granted." She paused while a heavy silver ring with a greenish stone was passed through the group with the usual giggles and witticisms. When it reached the lady, she too slipped it on her finger, and her eyes met Pansy's with an intensity that made the girl's heart leap.

"There is something—I'm not just imagining it," was her glorious thought.

"We now pass by this stairs, where you will 'bserve the 'riginal hand-hewn banisters—" Mrs. Sparks led the way up, casting her speech before her, indifferent whether it fell on good ground or on stony, and did not notice that the lady had dropped behind, apparently absorbed in the beauties of a Dutch landscape done in hair. Presently she and Pansy were left alone.

"Oh, go on, go on, be a sport—*what is it?*" was the girl's silent prayer, and, as though in answer, the lady suddenly came over to her.

"Will you think me very odd if I ask you a question?" she faltered. Her shy fluttered movements reminded Pansy of a bird let out of its cage for the first time. In her kind longing to help and her youthful

joy in having anything whatever happen, her "I'd love it!" fairly boiled over.

The lady found breathless difficulty in beginning. "If my husband were only here, he would know how to—to ask," she said nervously. "I am so *unaccustomed* to doing anything without him! But he had to go back for a week. He could not help it. I get a night letter every morning and roses every afternoon, but I *am* rather lost!" The appeal under her words, her troubled charm, made Pansy feel very stout and sheltering.

"Just say it," she urged. "Anything. I'm not sensitive."

She had only deepened the other's agitation. "You are like Henry; strong and—and—I don't know what he would want me

to say. But—are your mother and father living?" It seemed an unmomentous question, yet she wilted bodily when Pansy said that they were.

"And I've got three younger sisters," Pansy added, for good measure. "But they are all thin and dark, like mother. I don't look like any of them."

The lady searched the rosy curves of her face as though they hid a secret. "You are quite sure that you are your mother's own child—that you were not adopted?" she burst out.

The amazing idea left Pansy staring. Strangely enough—for she loved her parents dearly—a rich hope that perhaps she really had been adopted thrilled all her being. When she was little, she had secretly longed to be an orphan—it was so distin-



"You are quite sure that—that you were not adopted?"

guished! But that glamour was pale beside the brilliant possibility flashed on her by this troubled lady.

"Why, I never—supposed I was," she stammered.

"They sometimes don't tell them. Oh, would it be possible for me to speak to your mother?"

"She's up in Connecticut. My grandmother's here." Pansy hesitated. "She'd say it was all nonsense," she reluctantly brought out.

The lady passed her hand across her eyes as though she were waking herself up. "Of course it is—nonsense," she said sadly. "My husband would say that, too. Only you are so startlingly like—a—little girl—I used to know—I had to ask you. You are far more like her than—I have seen resemblances be-

fore, but never like this. When Henry gets back, I will bring him in. He—"

The knocker interrupted, and Pansy had to admit more tourists. By the time they had paid and registered, the lady's car was speeding down the street. It was like seeing fame and fortune slip from one's grasp. Pansy watched it out of sight, then turned to a mahogany mirror in Chippendale style, showing French influence, once in the possession of Madam Jumel, and searched for the secret that might lie under her round and guileless face until Granny's step on the stairs made her start back. In Pansy's family, mirrors were not made for girls to look in; monkeys lurked in their evil depths, and would come out to scratch the countenances of the vain.

"What ails you, child?" Mrs. Sparks

asked more than once that day. When, after supper, she found Pansy putting away the sugar in the ice chest, she lost all remnants of patience. "You go sit on a brocade chair and fold your hands; it's all you're good for to-night," she declared.

"Maybe it is what I was meant for," was the astonishing answer. Pansy had settled down on the floor, her arms about her knees. "Granny, did you happen to be about when I was born?"

"No, child. I never set eyes on you till you were six or seven." Granny always softened at a question that opened the past. She would have launched out on the tale of that first visit, with its triple measles, had Pansy not interrupted.

"Did mother write you about it—my coming, and all that?"

"I suppose so. I don't remember. She never was much of a hand to write, your mother. I know she'd got real discouraged about having a child—she'd been married four years. And then when they did start coming—my land!"

"Don't you think it's queer that there aren't any baby pictures of me?" Pansy urged. "We've got them of all the others."

"I guess there weren't any photographers at West Clinton. It was a lonesome place. I was glad when your mother moved down to Whitestone Corners. That was where I visited her."

"I wonder she didn't adopt a baby while she was waiting;" Pansy's voice had an odd significance, and she fixed Granny's face with a penetrating gaze, but it gave no sign.

"I don't hold much with adopting," Mrs.



"Granny, did you happen to be about when I was born?"

Sparks said. "There was Eliza Brown, who adopted that—" The tale flowed over unheeding ears. Pansy heard the knocker, however, and flew to answer it.

She could not sing out her usual greeting to Mr. Angus; she was too close to magic possibilities for every-day words. So she simply stood very straight before him on her two sturdy feet with her lips pressed tightly together over an escaping smile, and looked so generally incandescent that he laughed down on her for a silent moment before he spoke.

"Well, Pansy! You appear tired and fagged. I'm afraid it has been a dull day," he observed, coming in.

Pansy had no time for humor. She drew up her stool facing his chair, as she always did when the conversation was to be mo-

mentous, squeezing her hands between her knees, and not noticing that he, for sheer joy in her, took the same attitude.

"Now, Mr. Angus, listen! Doesn't it sometimes happen that rich people have a child stolen, and it is never found? The kidnappers get afraid and do something with the child, and some perfectly good people who don't know the truth adopt her or something? Aren't there cases like that?"

Mr. Angus considered. "I suppose it could happen. But when a child disappears for good, I imagine that always means it is dead, don't you?"

"Not always," said Pansy with a significant dip of her blonde head. "I am sure there are cases where she is found after she is grown up."

"Finding a child twenty years later might

be rather terrible," he suggested. "Suppose she had been brought up by vulgar, illiterate—"

Pansy's face had flamed. "They might be poor, but that wouldn't mean they were vulgar and illiterate," she flung back. "They might be just exactly as nice as the rich mother—and nicer!"

Mr. Angus looked bewildered. "I didn't know you were speaking of a real case," he apologized.

"Well, I wasn't, exactly;" Pansy cooled down with a visible effort. "But suppose a girl, lost like that, had grown up—oh, a pretty good sort, Mr. Angus!" Her troubled gaze pleaded for that possibility, and his smile conceded it. "Not wonderful in any way, but she did mean well and tried hard, and had never been silly about boys,

or that. Well, she could learn to be a rich girl pretty quickly, don't you believe? If she didn't think she knew it all, and really wanted to be taught?"

"A nice American girl could learn anything," he assented.

"Well, then, wouldn't it be gorgeous when her rich mother found her? Don't you think it would make the nicest story in the world?"

He looked as if he had suddenly found the clue. "A splendid story, Pansy. I hope you are writing it," he said, his casual tone designed not to alarm the shyness of the young author. "Of course, she would leave her old life—dear me, suppose she had a young man? Would she leave him?"

Pansy's candid eyes considered that with-

out a flicker of self-consciousness. "No; she hadn't, just then," she said.

Mr. Angus retreated in depressed haste from that aspect of the problem. "How would you explain their not finding the child, after the kidnappers had abandoned it? Rich people could search the country rather thoroughly."

Pansy had that all arranged. "They didn't know she was stolen; they supposed she had strayed away and been drowned or something. They thought the mother was silly because she would go on looking, year after year. And then one day, all pretty and sad in her rich clothes, she opened a door, and there, face to face with her, was—"

"Pan-sy!" called a voice from the kitchen.

"Oh, Granny, what is it?" Pansy spoke

with unwonted impatience, for her exalted spirit had been tumbled to earth rather too abruptly. Granny appeared in the doorway with a bottle and rags.

"All that furniture has got to be wiped off to-night, but of course if you are too busy—" she said severely.

Mr. Angus insisted that he help, and they had a beautiful time over the work. There was perhaps a touch of pedagogue in the young man, and Pansy was whole-heartedly a learner. One could not tell her anything that failed to rouse her vivid interest. Their talk ranged all over the world, Pansy appealing to him for knowledge with an intoxicating faith, but occasionally bringing him down by a word of candid common-sense that made him laugh aloud. She presently forgot her exciting secret, but when he

took her grimy hand for good night, it came rushing back almost like bad news.

"You would always be my best friend," she told him wistfully, looking up into his face as though to imprint it on her memory.

"And you will always be my dearest friend," was the grave answer. He was holding her hand very tightly. "You do like me, Pansy?"

"Oh, I love you, Mr. Angus," she said earnestly, and might have seen that she had nearly broken his heart if he had not turned away so abruptly.

2

GRANNY had gone to bed, but Pansy sat up for a long time composing a letter to her mother. She tore up many indirect approaches, and finally mailed a bald question:

"Dear Mother:

"This is private. Am I really your child? You didn't adopt me when I was little, did you? Don't think I'm crazy.

"Your loving

"PANSY."

She mailed this and went to bed, but hours later she came stealing back, a night-gowned figure slipping like a ghost among the old highboys and secretaries, and felt her way to a case of battered jewelry. In the center she found a heavy carved ring

with a large stone. She placed it on the third finger of her left hand, turning it three times.

"I wish that I may prove to be the lost child of a rich and beautiful lady, who will give me everything in the world and find me the joy of her life," she breathed, then replaced the ring. "There! The lady wished on it and I've wished on it, and if there is any good in the old thing, we'll find it out," she declared, tiptoeing back to bed.

For several days Pansy went about like a somnambulist, dreaming her dream. She asked her grandmother an amazing variety of questions.

"What do rich girls do in the morning, when they get up?" was one of them, asked across Dolly Madison's four-poster, on

which they were hanging clean dimity curtains. Mr. Angus would have at least tried to tell her, but Granny would only mutter some general reflection on ruining young people with wealth. "Do you suppose I could learn to run an automobile?" Pansy persisted.

"I think you'd be better at the wringer," was the discouraging answer. "What do you want of money, child? You'll not find happiness in wealth."

Pansy had heard that all her life, and had given it earnest thought. "Money doesn't make you happy if you can't be happy without it," she explained. "But if you can be just boiling happy without it—oh, gee, Granny, how it does add!"

The old woman shot an appraising glance over her spectacles at the fresh young face.

"You're no fool, Pansy—yet," she reluctantly conceded.

The lady had said she would come back, and every time a motor stopped at the door Pansy's heart nearly leaped from its moorings. She did come, finally, alone, in the middle of the morning, and beckoned the doorkeeper out to the car.

"Will you come and spend the day with me?" she asked with shy intensity, her appealing eyes following every line of the girl's lifted face. "My husband is not back yet, but I did want to see you again!"

"I'd love to!" Pansy breathed, and, looking up at the gentle fine-lady presence, she almost said, "My mother!" "I will ask my grandmother," she added hastily, for the rush of emotion had been followed by something very like shame.

"Will you tell her that it is Mrs. Henry Desmond, of Detroit?" The lady said it apologetically, as though claiming the name might be considered a boast, and Pansy tried to pass on its obvious importance as she flew for permission and to change her dress. Granny took one glance from the window.

"Oh, she'll bring you back," she said, turning away.

Pansy had a thrilled thought: "Perhaps she won't!" and then, again, that cold touch of shame. "But I'd love mother and father exactly the same, and go to see them every year, and do lovely things for them," she argued as she ran out.

The lady put her hand over Pansy's. "If you knew how I long for a dear young girl in my house!" she said.

In the late afternoon the motor brought Pansy back, alone. The tourists had gone, and Granny, who had done double work all day, sat for once with idle hands, looking tired and rather sad. The air was chilly, and an economical little fire flickered in the middle of the wide stone hearth. She glanced up at her grandchild with a wintry smile.

"Well, Pansy, I don't suppose I'll be keeping you long in a dull old place like this;" she spoke with surprising gentleness. "It's natural, dear child—it's natural."

Pansy was too absorbed in sobering thought to interpret the words. She drew her stool to the hearth and settled down there, still in hat and coat, her chin on her palms. For a long time neither spoke; then she looked up with a puzzled sigh.

"Queer, Granny!" she began solemnly.

"I've dreamed and dreamed of what fun it would be to be rich and grand; and Mrs. Desmond has dreamed and dreamed of having a dau— a young girl in the house; and yet by six o'clock I'll bet she was as tired of it as I was!"

Mrs. Sparks had straightened in her chair. The touch of aged indulgence was gone. "Well, I hope you behaved yourself, Pansy."

"Behaved?" Pansy flung hat and coat from her with a released sweep of her arms. "I haven't done anything else! Granny, I don't see how rich people stand it. First we took a drive—well, that was all right; and she told be about her little girl, who had died when she was away, ill, and her husband with her. She never could quite believe it, but, of course, it was true—and

she'd only have been sixteen now, anyway." Pansy sounded indignant. "Don't you think it's silly to pretend things aren't true just because you can't bear them?"

Mrs. Sparks never missed a chance to snub. "You wait till you've had a sorrow yourself before you lay down the law," she advised.

"My goodness, Granny, I can't feel anything worse than I did when my Gyppy was run over; but I don't go around fainting every time I see a little white dog with one black eye. Well, anyway, we got to the house at half past twelve, and Mr. Desmond likes her to lie down for an hour before lunch, so there I sat alone—with a *book* —for a mortal hour, starving to death, and not one blessed thing to do! She's taken a big house for four weeks, just because she

doesn't like hotels, and every room was in perfect order—just as if it had died and been laid out. No tools or implements or piece bags or anything—I didn't even see a pair of scissors. Don't rich people ever pound nails or make over clothes or invent a shoe box, or do something exciting with a piece of wire and a board and a couple of hooks? Do they just sit on chairs?"

"I guess they have considerable company," Granny offered.

"She doesn't. Henry thinks it excites and tires her. That's why she wants to adopt a dear young girl—or she did till this morning!" Pansy was fairly belligerent. "Granny, we had a good lunch, and I liked that a lot; and then we *sat for three hours.* She had some crocheting, but she didn't do much—he thinks it's bad for her eyes.

Finally, when I was pretty nearly crazy—I had tried every chair in the room and was beginning on the floor—she said maybe I'd like a little walk. I jumped at it, so she went and had her maid change all her clothes, and that was half an hour more. We walked about seven blocks, then she decided that it had turned cold and she needed her boa, so we went back, and then it was too late to set out again, so, praise God, I came home. And I suppose she is sitting some more. Oh, think if one had been born into a life like that!"

Mrs. Sparks faced the idea with unexpected tolerance. "I reckon you'd find ways to keep active. I shouldn't mind sitting a bit more, myself."

"Well, you shall, some day." Pansy laid her cheek on the old hands. "When I'm

married, you shall live with us and sit all you please." Then a frown gathered. The real trouble was coming to the surface. "Do you know, she's down on Mr. Angus? Can you imagine that?"

Granny reserved judgment. "What for?"

"His prices. She says he charges as much for his reproductions as if they were real antiques. My goodness, of course he has to —doesn't she know anything about the price of labor now? I tried to tell her, but she kept going back to an old carved chest handed down from Mathusalum or somebody that she got for almost nothing from a second-hand junk man in a back alley—she couldn't see that Mr. Angus pays rent and high wages. She says he was not sympathetic, and she's not going back to him again: 'Henry wouldn't want her to.'

Henry never lets her trade with people who aren't obliging. Mustn't he be a—nut?" She jumped up. "I'll change my gown, and then I'll get busy," she said. "If you want the cellar whitewashed, now's your chance."

"There's a letter from your mother," Granny called after her. "On your bureau."

Pansy went up to the familiar envelope with a shamed reluctance. What an idiot she had been, to write that question! Her mother's words were always gentle—perhaps because *her* mother's had been so sharp—but she could be counted on to point out a folly without trying to call it anything else. Pansy changed to her working clothes, putting off the reading until a new thought struck her drooping spirit prostrate. Perhaps her light-hearted question had hurt her mother. Perhaps, when a woman has borne

a child, nursed it, helped it to grow up with unfailing tenderness and love—perhaps a child's willingness to forego that motherhood would fall like a sharp sword. Perhaps all these days she had been carrying a great ache.

"Some people are skunks," said Pansy with pale lips, and broke open the letter.

"My own dear little girl, how did you get such a crazy idea? I hope it has not been making you unhappy. You have such good sense, and yet such wild notions—you remind me of old Dolly and the colt when we harness them together. I keep thinking of the day you were born. I had wanted you so long, I couldn't believe you really were coming, and then I was so sick, it seemed as if I must lose you. And then at last there

you were—I suppose you were squalling, Pansy, but it sounded sweeter than any music I ever heard. 'A splendid little girl,' the doctor called you. I was so proud and so happy. You looked just like a flower—a real sturdy, sensible little flower. We were going to name you Abby Electra, after the two grandmothers, and then we just couldn't. I guess calling you Pansy was the only foolish thing your father and I ever did, knowingly—but we never were sorry. One could love an adopted child, of course, but that first day, when they laid you beside me, and I stared and stared at my own little girl—"

Pansy's face was plunged into the letter. "Oh, I want her," she sobbed. "I'm homesick. I want to see my mother!"

It was a very subdued Pansy who presently went at the day's tasks. When Mr. Angus came in, long after supper, he found her still at it, polishing the glass lids of the show-cases.

"Hard at work," he said, standing over her. His voice had a kindness that healed and comforted. For the moment he felt almost like a mother. "I saw you going off in a grand motor to-day. How do you like being Cinderella again?"

"Oh, I've exploded Cinderella;" Pansy spoke grimly. "Working in the ashes was a cinch compared to being a princess on a gold chair. You needn't tell me!"

It was evidently no laughing matter, and he kept a grave face.

"Still, I suppose that every pretty girl wishes for pretty things," he hazarded.

"Oh, yes. She wishes. I tell you, Mr. Angus, if that old wishing ring had been in good working order a few day ago, there'd have been two lives pretty nearly wrecked by wishes!"

He could not help smiling. "You are such a gallant little Pansy! I love your courage for life. And yet—one would like to make it easier for you."

"Well, offer me an automobile and some fine clothes, and I'll throw over my mother and my father and—oh, I hate a girl!" Pansy nearly rubbed through the glass. "I have always said I'd have three boys and three girls, but I think now I'll stop at the boys."

It took Mr. Angus a moment to get back breath for a casual tone. "Oh, I hope there would be at least one little Pansy," he said,

affecting to examine a snuff box with a picture of William Tell on the lid. "We couldn't spare her."

If he had looked, he would have seen Pansy's hands droop and her blue eye fix as though she listened to something very faint and far off. A warm pleasantness lay about them like a pool of sunshine. Out of the open cases came the fragrance of other lives, richly lived; the old room seemed to be breathing like a rose jar. It was so sweet! The grave curve of Pansy's mouth deepened and her eyes slowly fell. Then she started forward, shattering the enchantment. Her head was ducked excitedly over a case.

"Granny!" she cried. "Oh, Granny!"

Mrs. Sparks put in a skeptical face from another room. "Well, what now?" she demanded.



Mrs. Sparks put in a skeptical face from another room

"Granny! You've mixed these rings!" Pansy was shouting. "Look—this isn't the wishing ring at all—here it is, in the corner, with the blue stone—don't you know? This one—why, Granny, it's the medicine ring—it's the ring that cures you of whatever's the matter with you!" Her eyes had widened to a look of awe.

"I guess one's as good as the other," Mrs. Sparks grumbled, turning away.

Pansy released a long breath as she restored the wishing ring to its place. "Well, you certainly are looked after in this world!" she admitted.

V

THE CONTINENTAL SWORD

I

THE door of the Oldest House in America stood open, letting in a long bar of sunlight. The ancient room still kept its mellow dusk, as though it had lost the power to absorb sunshine; only where the bar touched a brass warming-pan or a case of old swords on the wall was there light. From up-stairs came the custodian's droning tale:

"The fireplace, la's 'n' gen'm, has been r'stored, but the andirons 'p'esenting two continental soldiers with drawn weapons were once in the p'session of our grea' states-

man, Dan'l Webster. The han' pain' fire-screen that you see—"

The feet trooped on after the voice. The rosy Elizabethan maid who guarded the open door below yawned and let her head droop against the carved back of her chair. The sunlight threw her print gown and white cap into shining relief against the dark background; it glowed across a deeply curving cheek, astonishingly pink, and touched a throat as soft as a baby's. Pansy's eighteen years did not look much more than a ripe dozen as she drifted toward a doze in her quaint costume.

"By jove, is the little maid real?" The voice, laughing, strongly English, brought her up with a jerk, opening the sudden blue of her eyes. The man on the door-step was for the moment only a black shape against

the sunlight. "I beg your pardon!" The voice recognized a mistake about her age, but not a very serious one. It still laughed. "I thought perhaps it was I who was having the nap. A shilling, is it—what you call a quarter?" He brought the money out of his pocket with a clever left hand, and then Pansy saw that his right sleeve was folded up, and empty to the top. He had taken off his soft hat, crushing it into a pocket. "What a jolly old place! And are you the custodian?"

"She's up-stairs with a group. If you go on up, she will tell you the first part afterward." The words were automatic, for the heroic meaning of that British voice and empty sleeve had clutched Pansy's soft heart, till it was nearly suffocating her with a new and fragrant pain. They brought the

great war to the very threshold. The visitor stood well over six feet, straight and sound, apparently unconscious of his loss.

"A group?" There was an apprehensive twinkle. "Tourists?"

"Twenty of them," said Pansy, smiling back with her whole soul. It was so beautiful of him to be merry when he had fought and bled for his country! "It's a party. They came in that bus."

"Oh, I say—I don't have to go up, do I? Though of course I'm as much a tourist as they are," he added with a laugh.

"You wouldn't say that if you'd seen them," Pansy said, so earnestly that he laughed again.

"And do you sit here and collect their shillings all day long?" He was ready to find that a hardship and a shame—*he!*

"Oh, but it's fun," she explained. "It's seeing life. Why, I've had eighty-three bridal couples already!"

He evidently liked her very much indeed. "That *is* a record," he said. "And so this is seeing life?"

"Well, it's seeing a lot more than I ever did up home! And we have had senators and aviators and Grace Gordon—the Sunny Books, you know—and famous people of every kind. They register here, so we find them out." She did not offer him the pen, thinking it might prove difficult for him, but the brave left hand took it up and wrote a "Basil Lindsay, London," that was far more legible than the "Lulu Schmieder, Peoria," just above it.

The case of swords, flashing in the sunlight, caught his eye, and he crossed to them,

instantly absorbed. His left hand followed the blades or closed on the hilts as he studied their inscriptions, but there was no drooping of his fine young head and squared shoulders, nothing wistful about his firm mouth. His perfect unselfconsciousness only increased the ache in Pansy's breast. The battle smoke hung palpably about him. She saw the gallant charge, the fall, the limp body carried from the field, an arm dragging. A hot envy of his nurses swept her; they could serve him day and night. Splendid utterances—"For King and Country!"—"We are coming, Father Abraham!"—"Lord God of Battles!"—welled up in her heart. Oh, soldier hero—oh, *jimminy!*

"That's a queer thing, now!" The hero held up a dark old blade with rude and unadorned hilt.

Pansy made mechanical response: "This dull black weapon, of no grace or beauty, carried by a continental soldier of General Israel Putnam's command, was forged from the blade of a scythe. No doubt it was swinging in the farmer's hand the day before the call to arms sounded. From mowing the peaceful fields, it became a weapon for mowing down men."

He had listened respectfully. "That is very interesting. My grandfather has rather a jolly collection of old weapons; pikes and blunderbusses and that. He would give a good bit for this sword, but I expect it isn't for sale?"

Pansy hated to refuse him. She would have given him the sword on the spot if she had had the power. "Perhaps another one

could be found," she suggested. "I'll make inquiries if you like."

"That would be most good of you. I shall be stopping here for several days." And he reluctantly put back the sword as the group followed the custodian down the stairs.

Granny seemed to suspect that mischief had happened in her absence, for she swept an alert glance into every corner of the room, then fixed the one visitor with a disciplinary eye.

"You'll have to wait for the next group," she told him inexorably. "I can't go through it for one person."

"Oh, that is quite all right; don't trouble about me!" The voice proclaimed his nationality, and the tourists, seeing the empty sleeve, showed a sprinkling of the sentiment

that had engulfed Pansy. Ladies lingered near him, so palpably longing to offer some sympathetic word that even his unconsciousness was penetrated. He tried to move out of range, but their kindness dogged his steps, and when a pretty, faded young woman had tacked across his bows seven times, he broke away.

"I will be back to-morrow," he said to Pansy in passing. His eyes were annoyed and his face a little red as he strode off. The others slowly gathered for the waiting bus.

"He must have looked perfectly grand in his uniform," a wistful girl said, lingering on the door-step. She seemed to have expressed the feeling of the group; a collective sigh followed him.

The moment the day was over, Pansy, still counterfeiting the rosy maid of an

Elizabethan drama, ran down the ancient, crooked lane to its joining with the modern street. At the corner stood the delightful plastered and gabled shop of Angus MacDonald, Antiques and Reproductions. At the sound of Pansy's entrance, he came hurrying from the workroom above, pulling on his coat; then, seeing who it was, he paused on the stairs to enjoy the picture of her, standing with lifted face in the midst of his rich woods and old brocades.

"Good morrow, sweet mistress," he welcomed her. "How can I serve you?"

"Oh, Mr. Angus!" Pansy's words could not get out fast enough for the speed of her desire. "Do you know anywhere you can get another continental sword?"

He came down, all ready to be helpful. "Continental sword?"

"You know! This dull black weapon, carried by a continental soldier of General Israel Putnam's command, was forged from the blade of a scythe. Ugly old black thing. Oh, couldn't you find another?"

He thought in various directions, north and west, biting a dubious upper lip. "Anything happened to yours?" he asked.

"Oh, no; only some one wants to take one home for his grandfather's collection. And he'd give a good bit for it, Mr. Angus."

He was deeply pleased. "And so you came running to do your neighbor a good turn?"

"Oh, he's not a neighbor," Pansy explained; "unless you're thinking of the Bible. He's just here for a week. I want to find it for him awfully. Oh, couldn't you? Won't you help?"

The glow had died out of Mr. Angus' geniality. "Who is the man?" he asked.

"A young British officer—I think he was a captain, by the way he stood. He had lost an arm—his right arm!—but he could knock most men down with his left, he's so strong and brave and soldierly. He doesn't go about thinking he's tragic, either—he just acts as if nobody had a right arm. And he is so frightfully clever with his left hand, it makes you ache. Oh, if you'd seen him drop his handkerchief on his knee to open it—I wanted to cry out loud! Don't you think to give yourself for your country is the grandest thing a man can do?"

Mr. Angus, who was not at all a soldierly type, but poetic and somewhat stooping, had grown aloof and rather superior under the rush of Pansy's enthusiasm.

"Brass buttons do not excite me inordinately," he said. "Shooting one's fellow men and eventually getting shot seems to me a poor sort of glory."

"But wouldn't you defend your country?" she flared up.

He was exasperatingly cool. "I would run my country so justly and generously that it did not need that sort of defense."

"Oh, stuff! You mean to say you wouldn't fight, no matter what happened?"

"I hope not."

Words failed her. After a swelling moment she turned on her heel with an explosive, "Oh—*goodness!*" and left the shop. Mr. Angus continued to look superior as he went back to the workroom.

"And to think that I almost thought that I had a crush on him!" Pansy spoke vio-



"I shall have something more to say to you. I will write it," she said mysteriously

lently to the empty street. The pedestal whence Mr. Angus had smiled down on her was brutally empty. She felt as yet no sense of loss; when her wrath had cooled, she was as indifferent as the heathen who has tossed overboard his god. A man who wouldn't fight—oh, goodness gracious!

2

THE next morning Pansy's eyes rounded excitedly every time the knocker sounded, but at first only dull sightseers came. Then a tiny tapping suggested the joke of some passing child. Pansy flung open the door to give joyous chase, and nearly frightened away a pretty young woman, one of yesterday's group, who was fluttering on the doorstep.

She was a little faded, with intense brown eyes under a thicket of brown curls, and she came in as though it were a tremendous exploit.

"I didn't register yesterday," she said in a half whisper, giving Pansy a series of bright little nods. "I know I should have —regulations!—and it has been making me

uncomfortable. But my name—I write, you see. Poetry! And if one is discovered—you see? One is bothered." Her vivid glance searched the room, then she ventured it. "I'm Laura Lane," she breathed, and closed her eyes tight, as though it were not quite fair to watch the effect.

Pansy could not help being impressed. "Still, every one does register," she said. "Even the Vice-President did. And no one bothered him."

"Ah, but poetry!" She fairly twinkled with little smiles and head shakes. "It's different. Autographs! And then it's so intimate—and they quote you!" Her eyes were squeezed up, her very hands squeezed up against the ordeal. "But if I really ought to—" She was suddenly wide open again. "I'll do it this once," she concluded

abruptly, and turned with light quickness to the register.

She stayed for hours. Groups came and went, the lunch hour passed, and still she lurked in the darkest corners, or bent her face close down over cases of relics, as immovable as though she were photographing them on her brain. Pansy, seeing her stolen glance at every arrival, had a sudden illumination.

"Well, I hope he doesn't come, just to fool her," she said indignantly; and yet, when at last he did come, she forgot everything but the swelling joy in her breast. He was so content, so vigorous, so unconscious of the tearing pathos of his state! That was what made him so exquisitely a hero. And he liked her beaming smile.

"Seen much life to-day?" he asked.

"No; they were all pretty old," Pansy said. "Old fathers traveling for their health and old daughters going with them. They aren't much fun!"

"I suspect you would get fun out of anything," he laughed. Then he started back, an instinctive hand out for the door, his eyes on the poetess, who seemed to be bearing down on them in a sidewise fashion. "Isn't that one of those tourist ladies?" he breathed.

There was a struggle, bitter but short; then fair play won.

"Yes; but she's Laura Lane, the poetess," Pansy admitted.

"Oh, really! Is she very famous?"

"I—suppose so. She must be, for people are always bothering her for her autograph. At least, she says—" Then Pansy

broke off. "Oh, well, there's no sense in being a cat," she said with despondent candor. "The fact that I never heard of her doesn't mean much."

An American poetess evidently interested him, and Laura Lane, finding his glance upon her, tacked swiftly past them.

"There is an heirloom here that should have been kept by our mother, England," she let fall over her shoulder in passing.

He promptly took it up.

"Oh, really? May I ask what—?"

She showed him a pair of candle snuffers alleged to have belonged to Doctor Johnson —backing lightly away as though to prove that she would not hold him. He followed. Presently they were making a tour of the room together, and Pansy's heart ached like a bruise. How could a woman let him lift

lids for her and stand back for her! Pansy would have served him till she dropped.

Laura Lane had a tremendous flow of conversation. Once started, it swept them from treasure to treasure, then carried them up the stairs, through the rooms overhead, and down again; for an hour the bright jet never ceased. Then she suddenly darted back from him.

"I shall have something more to say to you. I will write it," she said mysteriously, and with a burst of little nods over her shoulder, she was gone. The hero stood quite still where she had left him, thinking over, perhaps, the inspired things she had said, for his eyes were fixed and his hand held his forehead. Then he, too, went away, slowly, as though dazed, his breath labored. He did not even say good night to Pansy.

The custodian spread sheets over the antiques and brought out broom and dustpan with a suggestive clatter, but still the rosy maid dreamed in the doorway.

"Well, Pansy, haven't you had about enough of that door for one day?" Mrs. Sparks demanded.

Pansy roused herself with a sigh and stretched longing arms up over her head.

"Oh, Granny, when people are fine and brave and heroic, don't you just want to die for them?" she burst out.

"Well, it doesn't keep me from doing my chores," said Granny, taking a clothes brush to a red velvet scabbard.

Early the next morning, before the Oldest House in America was fairly open, the fluttered tap sounded again.

"I suppose she's brought her dinner and

her bed this time," Pansy muttered as she went to open the door; but the poetess would not come in. She offered an envelope at arm's length, her body already at flight, while her spirit showered Pansy with bright nods and smiles and gleams.

"For him," her lips motioned. "I told him—he will come for it." And she was gone.

She had caught his name from the register; there it was, Basil Lindsay, Esquire, in a fine darting hand. Pansy placed the envelope on the registry desk and tried to forget it, but her day was dulled. It was bitter to see other people grow intimate with him while she just stood there.

Several days passed without bringing him, and then one afternoon at closing time, as Pansy let out the last tourist, she found

him on the threshold. He sent a cautious look inside before he ventured over it.

"I have only a minute," he explained. "I thought I would see if you had heard anything about another such old sword."

"No, I haven't; but this came for you." She gave him the letter with glum reluctance; then the cleverness he showed in opening it, his perfect freedom from self-consciousness or self-pity as he pressed the envelope against his coat and ran a finger under the flap, swept all the sulkiness from her heart.

"Oh, I wish we could give you the sword," she cried.

He did like her. His, "How very good of you!" came with a rewarding smile as he unfolded the note. Then he saw the

shape of the written page and nervously drew back.

"By jove, it's poetry," he muttered, turning to Pansy as though for protection. They read it together.

THE SWORD

Whether in faith we're going
 Heavenward and to God,
Whether we pass, unknowing,
 Back to the kindly sod,
Each must learn at the portal;
 But here in the living now,
I claim your deed as immortal,
 I bind this wreath for your brow!

The hero was hot and wretched. "What the deuce is it all about?" he objected.

"Oh, don't you see?" Pansy stuttered. Her face was ablaze.

Into the battle thunder,
Flame of its living flame,
Now on its crest, now under,
Leader of men, he came!
Whole as the good God made him,
Sword in his brave right arm—

"Oh, I say!" The leader of men was brick red and breathing hard. "Oh, confound the woman!" He crumpled the paper as though it were something shameful. This passion of modesty was the last drop for Pansy's brimming heart.

"Oh, you're so glorious!" she breathed, her plump hands forcibly holding her breast together.

He had not noticed. His protest was striding him about. "Oh, it is too sickening!" he stormed. "I did think, over here, I'd have a rest. Oh, I'd like to—" He



He crumpled the paper as though it were something shameful

squeezed and squeezed the poem, desperately in need of another hand to tear it. "You see, I lost my arm when I was a little chap, stealing a ride—it was most unromantic. I have done what work a maimed man can in all this, but I never saw a battlefield, naturally. And the dear kind public —I couldn't go about explaining, could I? Oh, it has been unspeakable! I give you my word, the old ladies would try to make me take their seats in the tube. And the girls—!" One arm could not do justice to the girls. "It grew too awful. I had to run away to get back my nerve. I was beginning to funk going on the streets—the very hooligans would salute and call me captain. I did think that off here— Now, I ask you, wouldn't it drive any man mad?"

Pansy had nothing to say. She could only

stare at him with round eyes whose very blue looked dulled. He presently laughed at his own wrath, took a last look at the sword, then held her limp hand very kindly in his strong left and wished her well; but she could find no words. When he had gone, she drooped in the doorway until she heard Granny coming; then she slipped out into the dusk.

She felt curiously empty, as though the bright center of her being had collapsed. And she was lonely, and lost, and the fun had gone out of everything. She thought of Mr. Angus, and her heart smote her that she had left him in anger just because he was not a fighter. The very word made Pansy's cheek hot. Who cared about fighters, anyway! Suddenly she was homesick for him, homesick for the ready sympathy

and understanding that he always had for her. Still in her quaint gown and cap, she went slowly down toward the gabled shop.

Mr. Angus stood in his corner doorway, smoking an evening pipe. He looked formidable—grown up and different. A passing cat paused to wind round his leg, but he coldly ignored it. An acquaintance called a greeting, but he barely nodded. It was painfully clear that he did not want to be bothered, and a new shyness held Pansy in the shadow of a great scarlet hibiscus.

She had not noticed a step behind her in the lane, and a voice made her jump.

"Well, will you look at the dolled-up kid!" A very plain youth stood over her, grinning vastly. "Say, who cut you out and painted you, and what little girl lost you, h'h?"

Pansy was no coward. She would have walked away in haughty silence, but he blocked her path.

"I just want to see if you're paper or wax," he said, and his hand closed on her forearm. Her wrath flamed up.

"Will—you—get—out!" she said with biting distinctness.

"Why, dolly, aren't you fierce!" He still held the struggling arm. "I wouldn't scare you for worlds. I just want—"

"Let that girl alone!" The voice cut like a sword. The youth dropped Pansy's arm with startled haste, then, seeing how unsoldierly an opponent he had to deal with, he hunched belligerent shoulders and stood his ground.

"Where do you come in?" he wanted to know.

Mr. Angus spoke with a concentrated quiet that shortened Pansy's breath. "Where any good American comes in. It is the American boast that a lady is safe anywhere. What is the sense in breaking it down?"

Their hands were in their pockets, but their eyes battled. Then the youth shrugged and slouched off up the lane again, whistling his superiority to the encounter. Mr. Angus, rather white and rigid, turned to Pansy.

"You are not frightened?"

"Oh, pouf—him!" said Pansy, and silence fell between them while her thoughts struggled for words. "You didn't fight," she said at last, "and yet you—you just bossed him, Mr. Angus! You talked sense to him. He could have fought fists, but not

that kind of mad. You didn't fight him—you *told* him. And—and it worked!"

His stiffness had visibly melted; all his old indulgence, his joy in her, was beaming down like the good and familiar sunshine.

"That's what we mean by arbitration," he said. "The soldier is glorious, Pansy; you were quite right. But, oh, my child, if we could only teach our countries to act as we expect high-minded and honorable and generous men to act"—his face was lit with the high beauty of the vision—"all together for the world's good! Oh, it's a dream, it's idealistic nonsense. The man on the street will tell you that man is born to hate and kill and grab, and that the sword is the only argument, the one final power. But I am not so sure!" He had never before shown her so much of himself, and as she stared

into his poetic, unworldly face, something stirred deeply within her.

"You make a sword look pretty sick," she said solemnly, and did not understand his burst of laughter.

The telephone summoned him, and, after lingering a few minutes, Pansy reluctantly turned toward home. At the bend in the lane a loud, "Boo!" made her jump back. The conquered youth was again grinning down on her.

"Oh, for goodness' sake!" muttered Pansy.

"Now don't get mad," he began. "Here, hold on. I just want to know where I can find a dolly like you for a little friend of mine who—"

Something interrupted—something very swift and crashing. A battering ram seemed to have come round the corner. Taken un-

awares, the youth went down with a heaviness that left him no rebound. Mr. Angus stepped over the fallen foe and laid a stern hand on Pansy's elbow.

"I will take you home," he said through locked lips.

At the door she ventured an apology: "I ought not to have gone out in these clothes, Mr. Angus. I am so used to them, I forget."

He was breathing very hard; his fist opened and shut enjoyably; he looked back as though he would fain have given chase to the retreating youth. Poetry, ideals, philosophy had been wiped out, and for the first time Pansy saw that he was young. And he could fight! Her heart leaped toward him.

"Of course, when arbitration won't

work—" he said hesitatingly, then gave it up.

"Oh, I think you're perfectly splendid!" said Pansy.

They beamed on each other.

"Oh, by the way," he said, "I had a notice to-day about a sale of Americana, a private collection, and it includes just such a sword as you wanted. I was going to bring you the notice to-night."

Pansy turned away, opening the door. "Oh, never mind it," she said. "He's gone. And it doesn't matter whether he finds it or not."

Mr. Angus smiled contentedly. "Well, I'll drop in anyway," he said.

VI

THE PHILOBIBLON

I

In the catalogue of the treasures contained in the Oldest House in America, between "Print, Flora and Ceres," and "Plates with views of Stratford-upon-Avon done in black, gilt edges," was "Philobiblon, or Book of Love." The custodian had never so much as lifted the broken marbled covers of the old volume, but, when Pansy came, she took pains to put it in a safe hiding-place. Pansy, of course, had pounced on the title at first sight of the catalogue, and demanded the book with a candor that shocked her grandmother.

"I'm surprised at you, Pansy! Books like that are not fit reading for a nice girl. I've put it where you'll not see it," she said severely, and Pansy, abashed, did not again ask; but it can not be denied that she seldom cleaned the old rooms without looking into possible hiding-places for the wicked but alluring work.

And then, one spring morning, when the winter rush of tourists had dwindled, leaving her many idle hours, and the heat was bringing every bud into blossom, she found it.

She had opened the clock-case before, but it stood in a shadowy corner with apparently only a few old pamphlets at the bottom. Driven to these in a last hope of entertainment, she uncovered a heavy book that brought a squeal to her very lips, where

it was hastily clapped back. Her eyes, gleaming triumph, watched an open door as she drew out her discovery; but there was only time to decipher the blurred "Philobiblon" across the back before the knocker, unwelcome for once, frightened the book into hiding again. Pansy's face was a study in suppressed mischief as she opened the door. All she thought of as yet was the joy of outwitting Granny.

Oddly enough, the young man she admitted wore very much the same expression, though neither recognized it in the other. After a swift glance about the room, he bought a catalogue and started in to "do" its treasures with a minute thoroughness that seemed to Pansy suspicious. Experience had taught her that men of his build—lightweight, queerly fashionable about the

shoulders, with little canes and smart waistcoats—did not come to the Oldest House for their own sakes, but, invariably, to show it to some girl. Lacking the girl, he must have another purpose, and, in spite of his prosperous aspect, it was conceivable that he might slip an antique or two into his pocket when he went away; she had read often enough of the "gentleman burglar" to have an eye out for him. For an hour she watched relentlessly as the visitor toiled through the antiques. In spite of smiling eyes and an air of whistling as he walked about, any one could have seen that he was restless and uneasy.

Suddenly he spoke.

"Your catalogue refers to a genuine Raphael," he began.

Pansy led him to the blackly shining Ma-

donna that held the center of the end wall and ran off the appropriate speech:

"We pause in reverence before this picture of the seated Madonna. You will observe the cherub in the lower left-hand corner; the great Raphael himself is supposed to have painted the hands. Connoisseurs from all over the world have stood here and agreed that only the great Raphael could have painted those hands."

The young man seemed lost in veneration. He studied the hands from every angle, he hung his head upside down for fresh vision. For at least fifteen minutes they held him, lost to everything else except his watch, at which he took a dozen furtive glances.

"I am dubious about the third and fourth fingers of the left hand," he said at last.

"The right hand is unmistakably Raphael, but those two fingers—I don't know! I should like to make a study of them."

Pansy was growing impatient. Granny had gone out, and she would have had a good chance at the hidden book but for that persistent presence. The young man's actions seemed harmless enough. He spent ten minutes holding a pencil at arm's length, squinting past it with one eye while his thumb-nail took measurements.

"They are wonderful, these modern methods of telling the genuine from the false," he informed her. "Slow, but infallible."

Pansy was no fool, and did not care if he found it out. "Like the Bertillon system," she said, giving him a straight and knock-down look. To her surprise, he burst into a

laugh, a light-hearted, relieved sort of laugh that made him almost likable. But before he could speak, the knocker sounded, and then sounded again in a shy and hurried fashion, and his attention became once more glued to the cherubic fingers.

Pansy always remembered her tourists, and the girl she admitted had come only a day or two before, dragging listlessly behind an energetic and domineering mother. She had looked as if she never had any fun, Pansy had thought. To-day her dark intense face showed a secret blaze of excitement, and yet she was clearly no nearer to "fun"; it was as though happiness, for her, might be only a new kind of trouble. Pansy's greeting brought no response. Though the graceful body hesitated at the threshold, the spirit had flown past.

The student of Raphael glanced up, carelessly, then allowed a surprised light to break over his countenance and sprang to his feet.

"Why, Nina—how jolly!" he exclaimed, coming to shake her hand. "Are you staying here? This is luck!"

She could not play up or even take in his playing. "I couldn't get away," she burst out. "Mother stayed in to answer some letters—hours and hours. It was horrible. I thought you would have given up. I nearly went mad, Lester. What did you think?"

It was useless to glance warning at her, and, after all, there was no one present but a negligible young woman, undoubtedly sympathetic, for she had turned away.

"I understood, of course. And you're only a few minutes late," he comforted her,

lifting her hand to his lips. "Pretty good to see you!" he murmured.

Their eyes, meeting, forgot to question. They sat down together on the John Quincy Adams davenport, in the shadow of the old clock, at whose base lay hidden all the secrets of love.

For a long time the steady murmur of their voices cast a rich glow of romance over the old room. Pansy honorably kept her back turned, pretending to be absorbed in darning a frayed corner of the Betty Cavendish sampler, but felt that she had a right to what her sharp ears could gather. The two had evidently been enduring the tortures of separation and forbidden intercourse for three months.

"Oh, the stupid old sights I've been dragged to," she cried, "and the stupid old

people in stupid hotels, and the music every night that made me almost *scream.*"

New York also had been a Sahara, but he wanted to forget that. When she suffered over deceiving her mother, he would have diverted her from that, too.

"We're here!" he kept reminding her. The happiness of the moment was enough for him, but he could not win her from the dark past and the difficult present and the uncertain future. She could not take the moment unless the whole were hers, and his easy faith that things would work themselves out some way could not even gain her attention. At last he was again glancing at his watch.

"There are some queer old things here," he suggested. "Shall we have a look at them?"

They made a slow tour of the rooms, and Pansy could see that now, having a girl to show them to, he was interested in the treasures, and wanted to talk about them; but the girl wanted to talk only of themselves. When he read long inscriptions to her, she grew restless, and presently she, too, was looking at her watch.

"I ought to go back," she said. "I will try to get away earlier to-morrow, Lester." They looked at each other over their clasped hands, not with the clinging gaze of their meeting, but with involuntary question in their eyes.

"Three months is a very long time," she said wistfully. "You seem—a little different. Do I?"

"Just three months sweeter," was the prompt answer—perhaps too prompt. It

did not seem to be quite what she wanted. Her dark glance was oblivious of Pansy as she passed out, but he, following after a discreet interval, paused to smile down on the plump figure in the white cap and print gown.

"You make a mighty nice little picture in this old doorway," he said. "Might be better worth studying than the other cherub." His tone openly admitted the joke between them and Pansy had too much fun in her not to laugh, but when he had gone, she frowned.

"I just don't like him," she decided.

Tourists and Granny kept her busy the rest of the day. It seemed almost as if Mrs. Sparks must have suspected the discovery, for she stayed within range of the clock-case all evening. Pansy grew impatient,

then indignant. Mr. Angus, coming down the lane at his usual hour, found her sitting on the door-step, glowering over doubled fists.

"Well, Pansy?" It was an unlocking voice, promising infinite sympathy. Pansy's fists relaxed and her speech was loosened.

"Mr. Angus, why shouldn't a nice girl want to know about love?" she burst out. "She's born wanting to know about it, I don't care how nice she is! Why must she play she doesn't care? What's the sense?"

He never failed her, never laughed when she was really in earnest or met her joke with solemnity, but it must be admitted that he sometimes needed a moment to get his breath. He sat down on the step beside her and took one knee into a rather tight clasp.

"I could tell you something about love,

Pansy," he said, his tone carefully impersonal. "What do you want to know?"

She could find no questions. "I don't believe I want to be told anything," she admitted frankly. "I want to find it out by myself—perhaps out of a book."

"Oh, no, dear!" The protest was involuntary, and he softened it with a hand laid over hers. Some of the knowledge that Pansy sought lay in that touch, but she drew away from it.

"You're as bad as Granny," she scolded. "I'm not so young and frail as you think. My goodness—haven't I been to the movies? If being nice means that you're never going to think about love till you're married—well, then, I'm not nice. And now you know it."

His deepened breathing was a chapter

on the mysterious subject, if she had only recognized it. Every breath seemed to begin and end in a sigh. Getting no answer, she presently grew uncomfortable. His warm approval was a very important element in her life.

"Oh, well, I don't mean anything so very dreadful," she temporized. "I've had lovers here to-day, and they make you wonder. They're awfully funny, Mr. Angus!"

She clearly wanted him to smile, so he tried to. "How did they show their absurdity?" he asked rather wearily.

Pansy told what she had gathered of parental opposition and clandestine romance. "They were crazy about each other, and had taken all that trouble to meet," she concluded, "and then they didn't get a bit of real fun out of it. They didn't laugh once!"

Mr. Angus abruptly rose to his feet. "Love does not laugh, Pansy!" His voice, lower than usual, had a stifled quality that frightened her. "Not in its deep moments. There is laughter in the outer court, but never, never in the temple. That is something for you to know about love." His eyes, dark and somber, held her lifted gaze for a strange moment; then he strode away without even a good night.

"My—gracious!" muttered Pansy, trying to sound like her every-day self; but it was not successful, for all her gallant young body was suddenly weak and trembling, and her heart dragged in her side.

The moment passed, but it left her deeply disturbed. "I suppose I'm in love again," she admitted with awed candor, "but it's acting very strangely." Tears rose to her

eyes. "It has always been fun before," she faltered.

It kept on acting strangely all that evening. At midnight a night-gowned figure came stealing into the old room, past gate-legged table and Jacobean highboy, past the print of Flora and Ceres and the plates showing views of Stratford-upon-Avon done in black, gilt edges, to the clock-case in the far corner. The flickering light showed an excited and defiant Pansy. She set down the candle and apparently addressed the clock.

"I don't care, I want to see that book," she informed it very distinctly. "It can't hurt me, and I have a right to know about love. Every girl has. And even if it is a sin to look at it, I would do it just the same. I'd sin to know what's in that book. If I'm



A hand seemed to close over hers, drawing it back

not nice, then I'm not, that's all. And I don't want to be." Having stated her position, Pansy opened the door of the case, and her hand, slipping under the pamphlets, had closed on hidden book when a curious thing happened.

"Oh, no, dear!" a voice said, warm and living, yet soundless; at the same moment a hand seemed to close over hers, drawing it back. She knelt very still under the invisible grasp, learning secrets that the real hand had only hinted, great, swelling secrets that no book on earth could have disclosed. Presently she dropped her flushed cheek against an invisible wrist.

"'I'm sorry, Angus. I'll be good," she whispered, and, closing the clock-case, she went softly back to bed.

2

MORNING brought the lovers again. They met at the door, coming together with a visible rush of the spirit that made the doorkeeper feel very tender of them. She kept other tourists away from their corner, and, when the number multiplied, she reminded her couple that they had not yet visited the rooms overhead. The young man looked back from the stairs to twinkle his acknowledgments.

"Another Raphael up here, isn't there?" he asked with a laugh.

Pansy maintained a disapproving gravity. "Love doesn't laugh," she silently instructed him.

Granny was ailing to-day, and her double

duties kept Pansy so busy that she had almost forgotten the lovers overhead when, later in the morning, a determined and businesslike hand demanded admission. Pansy, opening the door, stood inhospitably blank, but the lady was not sensitive to shades of welcome. She paid her quarter very much as though the doorkeeper were a slot, and forthwith took possession of the room and its contents. The old china was her first objective, but there was nothing to prevent her sailing on up any minute to the rooms above, where her own daughter with a forbidden lover was undoubtedly occupying the Henry Clay settle by the Daniel Webster andirons. And though this couple had not strongly appealed to Pansy's affections, on general principles she was for the lovers, every time.

There was no other staircase down, no possible place of concealment up there; if the mother chose to mount, she must come on them as inexorably as a pursuing thunder-storm. All Pansy could do was to give warning. Leaving her post, leaving priceless treasures at the mercy of three strange tourists, she fled up the stairs.

In the agitation of the moment she had forgotten that it is kinder to cough a warning, and her light feet brought her on them unannounced. It was not the orthodox tableau, however. The girl sat on the Henry Clay settle, heavy eyes watching one swinging foot, while the young man leaned against the (restored) chimney-piece, his hand in the act of smothering a yawn. He brightened visibly at Pansy's appearance, and even Nina looked up with alacrity.

"I'm sorry, but I thought I'd better tell you," Pansy burst out. "Your mother is down there."

She could not help enjoying the sensation she had caused. The girl started to her feet, too overwhelmed by the news to have any social consciousness of the messenger.

"Asking for me?"

"Oh, no. She doesn't dream you're here. But she may come up-stairs, you know; and I can't stop her," Pansy explained.

The young man would have played a valiant part. "I will see her, Nina; I'll take all the blame," he was beginning, buttoning his coat about him for action, but she stopped him.

"No. No, Lester." She had to think for a long moment before she could go on, but he seemed even prayerfully ready to wait.

"No. I will go down and get her to come away; and you must go back to New York," she decided. "We can't meet any more like this. It isn't right."

"I suppose it isn't," he conceded, very gloomily.

"No. We must just wait till she changes or—something. We can love each other without meeting or writing, Lester."

"Oh, rather!"

"Well, then—" Her troubled, puzzled eyes sought his. "We won't give up," she said faintly.

"I should say not!" was the hearty answer, and Pansy kindly left them.

When the girl followed her down, a moment later, the dark intensity of her face was softened into something very like relief. She slipped her hand confidingly un-



"I'm sorry, but I thought I'd better tell you," Pansy burst out

der her mother's arm before the latter had seen her.

"I have been here for hours," she explained. "It isn't very interesting. Let us go home, Mother!"

There was no one left in the room when the young man appeared. His fore glance down the stairs was humorous, his air was whistling. He stood in front of Pansy, looking down into the rosy youngness of her face with growing appreciation.

"You're a good little sport," he said. "If there is anything I can do for you—" His hand went hesitatingly toward his waistcoat pocket, but her frown checked him.

"There isn't," she informed him.

"Perfectly sure?" His gay eyes suggested a different kind of reward, and Pansy grew dangerous.

"You might go and let me get my lunch," she said.

"All right! Just one thing!" He took cool possession of her left hand, lifting it very close to his amused face. "I want to see if the cherub's third finger is genuine," he explained. Then, as she snatched it away, he went off laughing. "Good-by, little mad girl," he called back in a whisper from the door.

Pansy violently rubbed her hand in her skirt and hated him; but her wrath very soon was lost in a sense of saddening discovery. This seeing life was not always fun! Love, on trial, had made a poor showing. Love could bring two people rushing together, then coolly abandon them with all their vows on their hands—for you needn't tell Pansy that those two were not glad to

separate. A man could love one girl at ten and flirt with another at twelve. She, Pansy, had been deeply, gloriously in love only the night before, and now, in the bright hot noon, where was it? There was no one to remind her that she had slept little and eaten less, no one to explain that the passions, like the tides, have their daily ebb and flow. A sense of her own blind need of understanding became a bitter grievance as the afternoon dragged on. Granny dozed in her room, and no tourists came. When the closing hour struck, instead of getting out the sheets and the polishes, Pansy marched over to the clock-case, seized the forbidden book, and settling down on the floor, opened it on her lap far more boldly than she would have opened the Bible. (Among the young people of Pansy's large

family, it was considered humorous to be caught reading the Bible.) Her mouth had a defiant straightness, but her eyes were eager.

The closely printed pages looked curiously dry, and the chapter at which she opened did not sound especially wicked: "Some Remarks on the Prefaces to the First Edition of the Classics," by Beriah Botfield. After convincing herself that no sinister double meaning lay under Mr. Botfield's Remarks, she found a more promising chapter, headed "Private Letters from the Earl of Stafford to his Third Wife," and, a little breathless, ashamed yet determined, she plunged in after the forbidden fruit.

The fourth page found her skipping.

The noble Earl was a painfully dull correspondent, and his few formal phrases of attachment contained nothing that was new to Pansy. Another chapter, entitled "A Few Spanish Proverbs about Friars," did offer an occasional lawless allusion, but of a vague dull order—as if any one cared what a Friar did! Then, confronted by "A Short Account of Some of the Most Celebrated Libraries in Italy," Pansy indignantly turned to the title page. "Bibliographical and Historical Miscellanies," she read there; and then, "The Philobiblon Society is composed of persons interested in the history, collection or peculiarities of books." In spite of the catalogue, there was not one word about love.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" Pansy muttered.

Her first impulse was to thrust back the book and to look as if she had been merely dusting the clock-case. Then she prepared Granny's supper and went at the day's tasks with guilty energy. Mr. Angus found her still working off her sentence. For the first time in all their merry intimacy, her eyes could not meet his.

"Mr. Angus," she began, rubbing diligently at an ancient silver toddy ladle, "what does the word Philobiblon mean?"

He sat down as though he were very tired, his elbows on the table. He had not been at all like himself lately. "Why, love of books, I should say." He spoke absently, his eyes on Pansy's vigorous yet soft young arms, bared above their dimpled elbows.

Her color deepened, but she kept on: "Well, suppose some one was making out a

catalogue in a hurry—mightn't he translate it 'Book of Love'?"

"If he didn't know much Greek, I suppose he might."

"Queer mistakes do happen," said Pansy. "I think there ought to be some corrections made in our catalogue, Mr. Angus."

Glancing up, she was startled to meet a wholly new expression. In any one else she would have called it exasperation. It certainly was not sympathetic.

"Pansy, why do you always call me 'Mr.'?" he burst out. "Good heavens—twenty-eight is not venerable! Do you never under any circumstances think of me as Angus?"

Pansy was grieved, contrite. "Oh, yes, Mr. Angus! Why, I called you that to myself only last night."

"Did you, Pansy?" The frown vanished, swallowed up by the old beaming joy in her. "How did it come about?"

Again she could not quite face him. "Oh, you seemed to tell me not to do something, and I didn't—then. I did it later," she added with a quick flush.

"Something very bad?"

"It didn't turn out—very bad." An unwilling smile deepened the curve of her downcast cheek. "I got left," she admitted, with a stolen glance into his face. "But, Mr. Angus—"

"What's that I hear?"

She only looked puzzled.

"What did you call me?"

"Oh!" She laughed, but could not go on.

"Ah, well, if you don't want to!" he conceded sadly.

"But, Mr. Angus, I do," she cried. "I'd adore to call you—that. Only I can't seem to get going."

He moved over beside her and took away the toddy ladle.

"I wish you to give your whole mind to it," he said with pedagogic severity. "A big girl like you ought not to find it hard. A-n-g-u-s, Angus."

"Angus," said Pansy in a small voice. His arm was over the back of her chair, and she needed no book to tell her what might happen any minute if she stayed still. She stayed very still.

"Say it again, to be sure you have it," he commanded, bending nearer, as though it might be hard to hear. And then, before anything at all had happened, a loud knock at the door made them both jump.

Pansy opened to a messenger and had to sign for a little parcel. The address, when she brought it into the light, set her laughing:

"Girl at the Door,
probably named Rosy,
Oldest House in America."

"What can it be?" she wondered, breaking a jeweler's seal.

"Good imitation of impertinence, whatever it is," Mr. Angus muttered, but she was too excited to heed.

Under pink cotton was a twist of tissue-paper, and inside that a delightful turquoise ring. Pansy put it on with a squeal of joy, then, looking for an explanation, found an unsigned line of writing:



"Do you often get presents of jewelry from strangers?" he wanted to know

" 'A token of gratitude, for the only genuine cherub's left hand,' " she read, her pleasure visibly abating. "Oh, him!" she said disgustedly.

Mr. Angus had moved back to the other side of the table. The chased handle of the toddy ladle seemed to be absorbing his attention.

"Oh, I wish it were any one else," Pansy went on, studying her finger. "It's perfectly sweet. Well, I don't know his address, so I can't return it, and I don't have to thank him—that's one comfort." She tried it on different fingers and discussed its beauties until Mr. Angus' lips were suddenly unlocked.

"Do you often get presents of jewelry from strangers?" he wanted to know.

"No such luck," was the sturdy answer. "If you'd like to try it on, Mr. Angus—"

But Mr. Angus had discovered that he was late for an appointment, and hurried away.

VII

THE BRIDE CHAIR

I

THE sign of the Oldest House in America hung dejected in the sun; the very street looked dusty and forlorn. When the knocker sounded, the door, which had sprung open all winter as though opening were fun, dropped back slowly and grudgingly, with a sciatic reluctance. Instead of being welcomed by the rosy serving maid of an Elizabethan tavern, the tourist was frowned on by a severe old lady who looked as if she had lost something and suspected the tourist of having taken it.

Few came these hot days, but whenever four or five strayed in at once, the custodian firmly assembled them and ran off her tale. The George Washington cradle, the continental sword beaten from a plowshare, the Fountain of Youth in the back court, the wishing ring that would grant secret desires, the genuine Raphael—their story was droned out like a penance, and all the time the troubled old eyes looked past and beyond the audience, and the gray head was turned aside as though to listen.

"La's and gen'm, you do not see anything signif' in this fragm' ol' brick. You ask why we keep it so caref' in a glass case. Yet you will see that no jew'l this 'nique c'lection has a more 'mantic origin. This bit of brick—" A gust of hot wind rattled the door-latch, and the custodian stood for a

moment rigid as a statue of expectation, then went on with no consciousness of her pause—"comes from the house in St. Domingo built by Diego, son of Christ' Columb', 'scoverer 'Merica. . . . This quaint chair with the beaded seat and harp back is known as a bride chair. If a young woman si's in 's chair, she will become a bride within a year." She gave them the usual chance, evidently unaware that her audience consisted of three mature ladies, a lame man and a boy of twelve. "These silv' knee buckles, worn ball giv'n Newport 'n 'onor Gen' La-fay-ette—" The voice became more and more blurred till it was like that of a person talking in sleep. The boy started to giggle, but found himself suddenly impaled, mouth open, on her clear sharp gaze.

"You can't do this thing properly if you keep watching for her," she said straight at him, even through him. "You know she isn't coming for a week yet. What's the sense?" The boy wondered uneasily what he was being charged with, while his mother motioned him to stop it, whatever it was. The tale droned on as though there had been no interruption.

After the tourists had gone, the old house was as quiet as its dead past. Mrs. Sparks took a cup of tea on a corner of the kitchen table, but had not the heart to cook anything. She had done the work of the house early in the morning, for there was no young sleep that would be disturbed, and her own sleep had dwindled to a few uneasy hours since the light had gone out of the world two weeks ago; so there was nothing

to do now but sit in the twilight with folded hands.

A step outside brought a gleam of cheer. Mr. Angus had been very good about coming in since Pansy left. Sometimes they did not talk, but it was a comfort to have him sitting there. To-night his long presence in the doorway looked as drooping and forlorn as Mrs. Sparks felt.

"Any news?" he greeted her.

"No; nothing since Tuesday's letter. Pansy's no hand to write," Mrs. Sparks said.

"I suppose she is having too good a time." He openly longed to be contradicted, but Granny was not a comforter.

"Most likely. It's a dull life for the child here. I've my doubts if she comes back at all," she said, and then, seeing him stricken

past speech at the thought, she piled it up: "Oh, she went for three weeks, but when she gets with her family and her old friends, she'll feel different. It's natural. And she's grown up a good bit this winter. There'll be young men about—"

Mr. Angus sprang from his chair as though it had become red-hot. Granny watched him with sardonic eyes as he flung himself about the room; then she suddenly let him have it.

"Well, then, why did you leave her go? You had your chance to keep her."

He whirled so swiftly that several hundred dollars' worth of genuine antiques had a close shave. "What do you mean?"

"Man, hadn't you eyes in your head? Pansy thinks there's no one in the world like you. She looked real grieved the day

she went, and it wasn't at leaving her old Granny, I'll be bound. She's got over it by now, of course—"

"That is just it," he broke in. "She is so young, so unawakened—it didn't seem fair not to give her a chance to—to get over it. Don't you understand?"

"No," said Granny shortly. "In my day, if a man wanted a girl, he courted her. And that's what the young men up at home will do. Those are fine notions, but they'll leave you an old bachelder, I'm thinking. Well, that's your look-out, and I don't mean to be partial to my own flesh and blood; but if there's a girl on this earth that's Pansy's equal for sweetness and goodness and a merry heart, I've yet to see her."

He had sat down again, dropping his head into his hands. "You make me very

wretched," he said in a low voice. "I have held myself back. I wanted her to see me —from a distance—without anything to inflame her judgment. I am ten years older than she—I wanted her to be sure she could accept that. Oh, I wanted her happiness above everything on earth!"

Granny had no mercy. "Well, if you think she'll be happier married to some cheeky young Connecticut farmer who's got a new Ford, you've done just right," she congratulated him.

The face he lifted looked touchingly young. "Do you think I might go up there? Would that do?" he asked humbly. "I can start to-morrow."

Mrs. Sparks recognized that she had gone too far. "Ah, well, you might give her a chance to come back," she tempo-

rized. "It's only a week more, and she hasn't said she wouldn't."

"Only a week," he repeated with a ghost of a smile. "A week can be—"

The latch of the front door had rattled. It might be a gust of wind, but the two watched it as though turned to stone. It lifted, and slowly, cautiously, the door opened an inch, two inches.

"Who is it?" Granny's voice was like a smothered cry, and the door swung joyously wide in answer.

"Hello, Granny!" called a gay voice, boiling over with life: joyous blue eyes under a blue hat brim, rosy curves deepened with laughter, a gallant presence firmly planted on two sturdy feet—and the light was back in the world for Granny.

"Well, Pansy, you might have let me

know you were coming," she grumbled in the girl's embrace.

"I didn't know it myself. Oh, hello, Mr. Angus!" Pansy gave him her hand negligently, apparently scarcely aware of his presence. "I got worried about you, Granny. I knew that in the hour of death you wouldn't let one andiron go unpolished, and it didn't seem fair to leave you another minute. Oh, but I've had fun!" She glanced toward Mr. Angus, giving him a little edge of smile, but would not meet his eyes. "Parties—"

She plunged into the tale of her gaieties, but she did not tell it like the Pansy of two weeks ago. Something was changed in her, some milestone passed. Both her listeners felt that the trip had offered new and deep experience that held her inner thoughts

even while she laughed and made them laugh. Pansy at last had a secret. When Mr. Angus rose to go, she gave him her hand in the same averted, by-the-way fashion.

"Come in again soon," she said, as though she had forgotten that he came in every night.

Alone with Granny, she embraced her again, and emphasized the anxiety that had driven her back a week ahead of her time.

"You're a good child, Pansy," was the grave answer, but when the girl had gone to bed, a smile twitched in the region of Granny's penetrating old nose. "Well, she's back, anyhow," she muttered.

Pansy took her place by the door in the morning, but not in the old-time costume that she had fashioned to suit the Oldest

House. A new linen blouse and skirt made her seem alarmingly like a grown-up young lady.

"Oh, I think I won't dress up any more," she said in answer to a question. "It's a kid trick. And it seems to give every one the right to smile at me. You know, I'm nineteen now."

Granny, looking at the vividly blossoming face, thought that very possibly people might still smile when they were admitted, but she never in her life had said anything like that. "Well, see that you behave nineteen," was her kind of response.

It was fun to be back! Pansy did not say it in words, but every step, every laugh said it for her. The tourist business was surprisingly brisk that morning, as though to reward her return, and in the middle of the

busiest time, when they had a delegation of school-teachers and three bridal couples on their hands, a knock that belonged to evening had the audacity to interrupt. Mr. Angus, fresh and summery in white flannel, stood on the step, his Panama in one hand and a quarter in the other. He had expected to play his joke on a rosy maid in print gown and scarlet stockings, and the young lady in white linen was plainly a shock, but Pansy's dignified acceptance of the quarter gave him back his cue.

"I hear you have an interesting collection of Americana here," he began.

"I believe we have," said Pansy, and offered him the pen: "Will you kindly register?" Their glances crossed as he took the pen, but neither flinched. "Is there anything you especially wanted to see? Or will

you go round with the group?" she added. "They have only just started."

"I am looking for something very special," he said, carefully blotting the register. "A treasure that is unique to this collection. It has been absent, and I wanted to be sure that it is back again."

Laughter tugged at Pansy's lips but could not break her down. "Oh, you mean the bride chair," she said. "Yes—one of the spindles had to be replaced a while ago. It gets very hard wear—the tourists sit in it such a lot. But it is back again. The custodian is just coming to it."

She indicated the group, spreading out about a low chair with a beaded seat and harp back. "If a young woman sits in this chair, she will become a bride within a year," said Granny, and made the proper

pause. There were giggles and whispers, but no one sat.

"They never do it at the time," Pansy explained. "But later they pretend they're tired and just accidentally drop down, as if it were any old chair. Then some one tells them, and they squeal and jump up."

"But the mischief is done, of course."

"Oh, yes; they're in for it." Pansy looked over the group with an experienced eye. "That big one in the pink blouse will do it —unless the thin old girl in the tulle hat beats her to it. You watch."

Mr. Angus suddenly exploded with laughter. "Pansy, you cynic! And I thought you such a guileless little maid!"

"Well, I've got an eye in my head. And it has been seeing life this winter, I can tell you."

"How did home seem to you, going back?"

He had touched the edge of her secret. She glanced quickly to see if he suspected it, then looked away with a grave little smile. "Oh, great fun," she said. "But you know, if you stand here laughing with me, Mr. Angus, Granny will give it to us both. I'm on duty."

He did not look like laughing now. "Did you call the young men up at home Mr. Johnny and Mr. Tom and Mr. Abner?" he wanted to know.

Pansy flushed, but evaded the point. "Granny has been reading my letters to you," she complained.

"Well, I didn't get any letter of my own to read, Pansy. Not even a picture postal. And I wrote you a long letter every night."

She started. "Why, I didn't—"

"Oh, they were not mailed," he said coolly. "But I did think you might have answered at least once!"

A smile was stealing into the deep curves about Pansy's firmly controlled lips. Her glance seemed to be measuring a jump; then she took it.

"Well, I did!" she said, and turned away to admit another delegation of school-teachers. Granny was taking her flock up-stairs, so Pansy had to play custodian, and Mr. Angus, finding himself deserted, presently went back to his own neglected business.

2

THE shop from the rear appeared an ordinary two-and-a-half-story house, left over from the days when this was a residence neighborhood; but the side and front, with their plaster and cross-beams, gables and leaded casements, looked so alluringly mellow and English that few tourists with money to spend could resist the hanging sign of Angus MacDonald, Antiques and Reproductions. The business had been founded by Angus, Senior, and, though it was the son who had transformed the premises and built up the trade, he was still only "Mr. Angus" to those who remembered shrewd, kindly old MacDonald. He had his workrooms on the second floor, but there was plenty of space in the back yard for a

workshop, if he ever wished to put the pleasant upper stories to a more personal use. He spent the rest of the day, when he was not demanded by customers, taking measurements up there, tapping thoughtfully on partitions, and selecting from his stock certain delightful articles of furniture, which he piled in a store room. When a rosewood sewing table vanished, his assistant protested:

"There was a lady nearly bought that this morning; and I think she's coming back."

"She can't have it," said the lover. "Tell her we will reproduce it at the same price," the business man added.

The assistant prophesied that they would lose the sale, but there was no doing anything with Mr. Angus to-day. He merely whistled and took more measurements.

He had his plans in his pocket when he went down to the Oldest House that evening, but there was no chance to show them, for another caller was getting down from a small car at Pansy's threshold. He was a big, ruddy, handsome young man in blue serge and a boyish sailor, and he grinned good-humoredly at Angus, evidently in no fear of him as a rival, even though they knocked at the same door. Angus, poetic and slightly stooping, winced at the relentless power of beef over spirit, and knew a black desire to run the other through the insolent young body as he made polite response.

The door opened, but Angus went ungreeted in the astonishment of Pansy's "Why, Abner!"

It was his little joke to be surprised at

her surprise. "Why, you haven't forgotten that we have an engagement for to-night, have you?" he asked, ready to be injured. "Here I am, with the machine."

Pansy could not play up. Angus hoped that it was dismay that held her so flushed and confused, but felt a sickening uncertainty.

"But I sent you word—" she stammered.

"Oh, well, I didn't care what state of the Union we kept it in," he said largely. "I couldn't bring the new Ford, but I picked up one near the station, and it's the same old moon, anyway. You aren't thinking of going back on me, are you?"

Angus, of course, had to come to her relief. "Perhaps you will let me drop in some other night," he suggested, and, conscious that his smile was a grin of pain, he said

good night and went hastily away. If he had only walked more slowly, he would have heard the explosive, "Abner, you perfect idiot!" that relieved Pansy's congested emotions.

"I don't see it," was the cool answer. "Put on your hat and come along, Pansy. A date's a date."

For three very long nights and days Angus kept away from the Oldest House. It was not only the beefy presence of this Abner that was stripping him of what little flesh he had; in the sense of his own personal failure lay the intolerable bitterness. That was what women liked—a Lochinvar dash across country to win them, a clear, single, male determination that was not hampered by Quixotic scruples. Abner's limitations of mind and soul were written

all over his healthy, good-humored young face, yet he had proved the better lover, and it was as a lover that a man was measured in a girl's eyes. Angus read his own failure so clearly that he did not even question what Pansy's estimate might be.

"Well, I can be a good loser. That is all that's left," he said wearily as he closed the shutters at the end of the third day. Then he wondered with a start if he had spoken aloud, for some one had pushed open the shop door and stepped inside, hidden from him by a colonial secretary.

"You wanted to see something?" he asked, coming forward. Then his professional manner fell from him and his heart cried out: "Pansy!"

She was laughing, yet embarrassed, and so plainly could not find her tongue that he

had to find his and help her. He dimly realized that Abner, at such a crisis, would have followed his uncomplicated instincts and gathered her into his two arms, but such knowledge availed Angus nothing. He could only obey his chivalrous need to protect his love even from himself.

"Come in! I'm glad to see you," he said cheerfully. "Hasn't it been hot!"

Pansy, fresh and fine in sheer white (she and her mother must have had an orgy of sewing in those two weeks), gave him a quick glance and looked away. "Then you are all right," she said. "Granny was afraid you might be ill—you haven't been in for so long."

"Oh, no, not ill. But I thought, as you had a guest from home—" He could not

maintain that easy tone for another syllable, so he stopped short.

"Yes; Abner's here." Pansy was apparently trying to dig a hole in the floor with the toe of her white shoe, and it was revealed to him with a dreadful clearness that she had come to say something, something that even her candid spirit found difficult. He could not help her; there was a limit to what might be demanded of a man. Instead he showed her with false enthusiasm a table he had just picked up. It had a marquetry inlay in its marble top and was delightfully ugly.

"Well, it may have character and all that, but I wouldn't be found dead with it in my house," said Pansy, successfully diverted for the moment. "Where has the little rose-

wood work table gone? Oh, I hope that hasn't been sold. I did love it."

Silently Mr. Angus took out a key and led her to the store room. There with the sewing table were all the things she had loved best—a Jacobean chair of carved walnut, an old oak dresser and a spice cupboard, a pole screen with a silken banner embroidered in faded garlands, and, dearest of all, an ancient Chinese bedroom set of black lacquer decorated with birds and flowers done in mother-of-pearl.

"Why, there are my things!" she cried. "These are my best favorites! Why have you hidden them away like this?"

She did not dream why, and before the clear candor of her eyes his own fell, discouraged.

"Oh, I had a crazy idea of turning the

up-stairs into an apartment and furnishing it," he said. "Don't you think it would be just the thing for some young married couple?"

She was caressing the bird of paradise on the lacquer bureau with reluctant fingers. Her lips had taken a pathetic droop. "Oh!" she said—a little hurt note that, of course, might have been all for the furniture, but it brought him close to her shoulder.

"Do you want to see the plans?" He laid them before her and Pansy bent rather sulkily to look.

"I'm fed up on bridal couples," she muttered, but when she realized that he had put the kitchen on the sunny side, she had to take hold. "Do you want to roast the cook as well as the dinner?" she demanded. "It's likely to be the bride herself, you

know; and much fun she'd be to come home to after an afternoon in a southwest kitchen!"

"By George, I didn't think of that. See what other blunders I've made, Pansy."

His humility was touching, and the impracticability of the plan he had made gradually restored her spirits. She moved his fireplaces and bunched his plumbing, and rescued enough waste room for a large linen closet and a broom cupboard. Presently she was up-stairs, looking over the ground for herself and discovering new possibilities every moment. The lines of the rooms and the rows of leaded windows gave a potential charm that made her very sober.

"If you had seen as much of bridal couples as I have, you wouldn't waste Chi-

nese lacquer on them," she burst out. "It is going to be too darling to rent to—"

"Oh, I was not planning to rent it," he said quickly.

There was a flame in her averted face. He read it as understanding, but, before he could cross to her, she had opened the window and was waving her hand.

"Hello!" she called. "Wait a moment—I'm coming. It's Abner," she explained over her shoulder. "He invited himself to supper, so I suppose I'd better go home and get it. It must be late." She talked on cheerfully as she ran down to the door, but not one word did he answer, though he followed. In the doorway she looked out at the waiting Abner, then back into his dark face, and again it was evident that she had something to say. It took an awful moment

of balancing and fumbling with the latch to get started.

"Abner is still here," she began. A long breath, taken with reluctant courage, was weakly released again. She edged past the door, measuring the distance from her to Abner with a scared glance. "Well, he says he won't go—till I tell him—I'm definitely engaged to some one else!" She finished breathless and ran, unconsciously clutching at Abner's sleeve. "Good night, Mr. Angus!" she called back with desperate politeness; but Mr. Angus could produce no civilized sound. He could only stand where she had left him, his transfigured face hidden in the dusky room.

Granny opened the door to him that evening. Pansy was very busy darning a bit of old tapestry, too busy to take off her thimble



"Granny, my company is stupid to-night," she said suddenly

for his hand-shake or to look up from her colored silks. Abner sat across the corner of a highly carved and uncomfortable chair, some of whose knobs seemed to have penetrated his spirit, for he swung a gloomy foot and took no interest in conversation. Angus was willing but incoherent, and Pansy labored between them until her patience was dangerously frayed.

"Granny, my company is stupid tonight," she said suddenly. "Tell them a story—the one about the Seminole chief and the wax flowers. I can't work so hard over them."

"I doubt if they'd be interested," observed Granny.

"Oh, yes, they would. But this chair is too high." She looked about. "Angus, let me have that low one over there." She

brought out his name as composedly as if it had never presented the slightest difficulty, and refused to see the look that thanked her as he started up—or the still more poignant look with which he recognized the chair. A full moment passed before he came back with it—a quaint low chair with a beaded seat and a harp back. Pansy transferred herself to it with perfect composure, and the morose Abner did not notice, but from Granny's corner there came an explosive snort. It might have been laughter—no one had ever heard Granny laugh—or perhaps only a cough; whatever it was, it left no trace on her severe features. A moment later she made some excuse to leave the room, and from the other side of the door the sound was distinctly repeated. Pansy's chin just quivered for an instant,

and Abner, perhaps dimly conscious of unseen forces, dragged himself up.

"Well, I'll go along," he said. "See you to-morrow, Pansy."

She made a frightened attempt to keep him, but Angus opened the door and sped him with a hearty hand-shake. Then he came back to Pansy and took the work from her hands.

"Little bride! Little bride!" he said over and over until she was all his.

"What made you come back, Pansy?" he asked presently. She was still in the bride chair, and he had brought a stool up close beside her.

"You did," said Pansy. Her eyes, big with new knowledge, were looking into his face as if she had never wholly seen it before. "You called me."

"You heard, then!"

"Oh, yes. Every day. Not so much in the mornings, when you were busy, but toward sunset, and, oh, all the evening. You called, called, Angus! It would come just like your voice. I couldn't have made it up. It had to be you."

"And did you answer?"

"Didn't you get it?"

"Ah, how could I believe? It might have been only my own longing."

She had no secrets now. "It was so dreadful, being away from you! I had no idea—I didn't dream, when I went away—Do you remember Budge and Toddy? Well, my heart went just like Toddy, all day long—'Wanto—shee—Angus! Wanto—shee—Angus!'—till I couldn't bear it another minute."

"And so you ran back. Ah, Pansy, when you opened the door—"

When they came to speech again they were on the John Quincy Adams davenport, where other lovers had sat, in the shadow of the clock-case, at the dark end of the old room.

"I thought Abner must win you with that Lochinvar dash of his," he said with a long sigh for past miseries. "Didn't it touch you at all? Surely any girl must have been moved by that!"

Pansy straightened up with a sudden return to her every-day self. "Oh, yes, it was dashing," she said vigorously. "And it was just Abner all over. He has got to have what he wants the minute he wants it, no matter where it is or what it costs. That's very romantic in a lover, but when you

think of being married to it—thank you, I'd rather have a little plain sense!"

His old joy in her was carving his face with laughing lines. "Ah, Pansy, how does any one go straight without you?" he cried, in pity for an ungladdened and undirected world.



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DATE DUE

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Tompkins, Juliet Wilbor,
1871-
At the sign of the oldest
house;



